SPLENDID WHITSUN HOLIDAY NUMBER.

SHORT STORIES

"Promise to marry me," she cried, "or your pursuers below shall capture you!"

(An Intensely Dramatic Incident from the Magnificent Complete Story, "The Greed of Gold." See inside.)

No. 803. Week ending May 21, 1904. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

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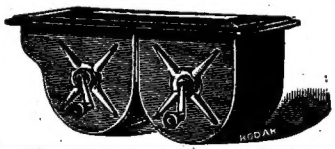

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SHORT STORIES

No. 803.] [ONE PENNY.

Week Ending May 21st, 1904.

THE GREED OF GOLD.

A Thrilling Tale of Love, Passion, and Hate.

Containing the Incident Depicted on the Cover.

"WHAT! Marry the daughter of a country rector! And you ask me to give my consent! Do you think me as profound a fool as yourself?"

Andrew Conway found it difficult to proceed. His anger seemed to deprive him of the power to speak the words that foamed to his lips. But his hearer was in no way abashed. Roy Conway faced his uncle without flinching.

"Yes," he said calmly, "I am no schoolboy now, and I believe I have the undisputed right to choose whomsoever I will in a question which so nearly affects my future happiness. I am sorry to find you so quick to oppose me in my choice of a wife. But, in justice to myself, I must abide by the decision to which I have come. Miss Laura Merrivale, though but the daughter of a country rector, is equal to me in all other respects than that of birth. Nay, she is, in many respects, by far my superior. And as to fortune, what have I to boast of? I have no separate income of my own, save a few hundreds a year bequeathed to me by my dead father, and I owe all else to your indulgence."

Andrew Conway brought his hand down upon the table with a mighty thud. His anger was terrible to witness and his voice could be heard outside the room in which the two men sat.

"You fool!" he burst out. "Have you not sense enough to see that it is this very fact which makes it imperative—do you hear me, sir?—*imperative* that you should marry a woman of means? The bulk of my money goes to my son in India. *He* can choose a wife wheresoever he will. But you—you will have a few more paltry hundreds added to those you already have—nothing more. I have spent money on your education with a lavishness that was due to this one hope. You are well born, and poor. A wealthy marriage is the only possible course for you to take. Please consider this as final, sir, and let me hear no more of this rector's daughter."

He waved his nephew aside, as though the matter were concluded. Roy Conway passed out through the French windows that led from his uncle's study to the smooth grass-grown lawn.

"It's likely to be a battle royal," he said below his breath. "But love will conquer in the end. Poor little Laura! I wonder what she would say could she hear the old fellow. He's been awfully good to me; but, ah, there's the rub! Well, I must try to win him over in time."

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Musing thus, he crossed the lawn and passed out on to the high road. After such a scene, it was as well to seek the soothing society of Laura Merrivale.

* * * * * * *

Ralph Warner was sitting by the writing-table in the study of his tasteful but miniature villa. With an exclamation of surprise, he broke the seal of a thin packet which bore the Indian postmark. True, he had written to his cousin, Egbert Conway, a couple of months back, but he had scarcely looked for a reply. Opening the letter, he read as follows:—

"*Illawarra, India.*

"DEAR SIR,—*I have to announce the sad and unexpected death of a young gentleman travelling through this neighbourhood. From letters found in his possession I gather that his name is Mr. Egbert Conway, a cousin of your own. His father is, I believe, still living, and residing in the same district as yourself. I deemed it wise, therefore, to write first to you, in order that you may have the opportunity of more gently breaking the sad news to the bereaved father. The circumstances of Mr. Egbert Conway's death are most painful. As you are doubtless aware, he revelled in big-game hunting, and it was while on a solitary expedition of this kind, and accompanied only by a few natives, that he lost his life. It is, I fear, but a poor satisfaction that we have succeeded in killing the tiger who was responsible for this sad affair.—Yours very sincerely,*

"M. J. CAREW."

Ralph Warner uttered an exclamation, not of sorrow, but of surprise. For some time he sat there, silently thinking of all this would mean. His face was not a pleasant one. Greed, avarice, covetousness, self-indulgence—all were plainly to be seen there. Presently he began to speak, in a low undertone that was full of dark, mysterious significance.

"So!" he whispered softly to himself. "The road is being cleared. Andrew Conway cannot live for ever. His only son is dead, struck down by a tiger. His nephew Roy is therefore the present heir to all his great wealth. After him—ah, then comes my turn! It's fortunate the old man regards me favourably. I, too, am his nephew, and—some day—well, we shall see."

Again he mused, but presently resumed his monologue.

"The old man's heart is none of the strongest," he whispered. "If I were to break this news to him—suddenly——"

Once more he paused, and a different idea flashed through his brain

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"Suppose—suppose—he should be—murdered—and—and Roy should be accused of the crime. Suppose—Roy should be—hanged!"

He started, looking nervously about him. Then he put on his hat and went out for a walk in the wood hard by.

* * * * * * *

It was night. Dark clouds were hurrying across the sky, blotting out the moon with their thick, impenetrable pall. The hour was late, and Ralph Warner's little villa stood dark and silent by the side of the road.

Presently the figure of a girl came stealing along amid the many shadows till she reached the gate of the villa. Entering silently, she approached the window of the dark study and tapped softly on the pane. There was no response. The window was open a few inches, and, after a moment's hesitation, the girl lifted it still higher and climbed into the room. Closing the window again, she drew down the blind, and striking a match, lit the lamp which stood upon the table. The next instant her eyes fell on the letter which Ralph Warner had that day received from India, and, picking it up, she read it through. When she had finished, the expression on her face was a curious mixture of horror, fear, hope, craft, dread, and anticipation. It was a beautiful face, but the beauty was that of a woman in whose breast all the passions of life are allowed to revel unchecked—beauty that fascinated, yet repelled.

"Ah!" she said, sinking into a chair. "So one hindrance is removed from his path! He may play a desperate game now—nay, if I know the man, he *will!* Well, he mustn't forget *me*!"

A smile of cruel triumph came into her dark, gipsy eyes—a smile that showed all the possibilities of her fierce, uncontrollable nature—that made one instinctively remember the tiger—and shudder.

"He's been trying to shake me off of late," she went on. "He doesn't know what such love as mine can be when it turns to hate. You are a masterful man, Ralph Warner, but you may carry it too far with me. I have played the weak woman long enough. It will be wise not to rouse me into the fiend I *can* be. I wonder where he is gone. Perhaps——"

She started to her feet. A moment, and she had extinguished the lamp, and was once more hurrying through the darkness of the night.

Presently she came to the gates of Andrew Conway's great house. Passing these, she slipped through a gap in the hedge, and, stealing among the tall trees, came at last to the lawn before the house. A light was burning in the study, whence the sound of angry voices reached her ear. Was Ralph Warner with his uncle? Was he breaking to him the news of his son's death? If so, why this angry uproar? She was just about to creep still closer to the house when the French windows were thrown suddenly open, and Roy Conway, flushed and irritated, burst out of the room and hurried across the lawn to the road beyond.

For a few minutes Julia Tempest stood where she was. She was just in the act of moving away when she saw a dark shadow come between her and the light of the study lamp. An instant later she saw a quick flash, and a sharp report rang out through the night. Then, almost before she could realise it, the figure of a man dashed past her in the darkness. He did not see her as he flew by. But she both saw and recognised him. For the man was none other than Ralph Warner.

* * * * * * *

The court was crowded to the doors. From far and near the people had come to hear the trial of a case that was regarded as the most remarkable and sensational of their generation. For upwards of a year the prisoner had been in custody. Remand had followed remand, till the indictment of murder had to be abandoned and the charge of wounding with intent to kill substituted in its place.

Amid the whispering of the many spectators and the cries of the court ushers, the judge took his seat, the prisoner was placed in the dock, and the evidence began. It was shown that one, Andrew Conway, had been fired at with a revolver more than twelve months before. The object of the crime was unquestionably one of murder. Yet, by a curious circumstance, the bullet, which had lodged in the victim's brain, had not effected his death, but had produced a state of coma, indefinitely protracted, and the unhappy gentleman was still alive. Not once in all the past year had he recovered consciousness, but lay there in his bed, uttering no sound, with his eyes half closed, his face white and ghastly.

The law decrees that, should a man live beyond a year and a day after his life has been attempted, the charge of murder shall not be brought against his assailant. Week by week the death of Andrew Conway had been expected. But he still lingered in a state of living death, and Roy Conway, his nephew, stood arraigned for the crime of wounding with intent to kill.

The court was hot and stifling. Wearily the many witnesses took their places in the box and gave their evidence. From the very first, the case looked black against the accused. Servants swore to the repeated quarrels between Andrew Conway and his nephew Roy, and the evident unwillingness with which they gave their evidence told strongly against the prisoner. Angry threats, spoken during these quarrels and now repeated by the servants, seemed to possess a terrible significance in the light of the subsequent tragedy. And then the revolver was produced in court and shown to them one by one. No one attempted to deny it. It was the property of Roy Conway. It had been sent to the gunsmith's two days before the tragedy for some repairs, and had been returned late in the afternoon of the day preceding the night of the crime. Roy Conway was out when it arrived, and the butler had taken it in and laid it upon the hall-table ready for Roy when he should return.

No one seemed to think it worth while to state that Andrew Conway's other nephew, Ralph Warner, had called that same afternoon, while the revolver lay upon the hall-table. The weapon was Roy's.

A violent scene had taken place between the two men—a scene that had terminated, on one side at least, in blows. A few moments later, the sound of a shot was heard, and, rushing in, they found their master prone upon the floor with a wound in his head. The fateful revolver was picked up outside the French windows, and, later, Roy Conway was discovered pacing agitatedly beneath the park trees. A piece of his tweed coat was tightly grasped in his uncle's hand. But from that day to this, poor Andrew Conway had spoken no word.

It all came to an end at last. And, amid the profoundest stillness in the crowded court, Roy Conway received his sentence of fifteen years' penal servitude.

* * * * *

Once more Ralph Warner was seated in his study, and again it was night. He was reading an account of his cousin's trial, and, as he finished, a sigh of relief escaped his lips. But it quickly changed to one of vexation. All his plans seemed to have gone awry. What strange fate had kept his uncle alive so long? Had he died, all would have gone well. But now——

There was a stealthy tap at the window, and his face darkened at the sound.

"Confound her!" he muttered. "Shall I never be able to shake her off?"

He went to the window, threw it open, and assisted Julia Tempest into the room. There was a smile on his face now, but the smile was an ugly one.

"You honour me," he said, placing a chair for her. "Truly you have one virtue which many would do well to emulate. You are a perfect paragon of constancy."

He sneered as he spoke the words, and the girl flashed him a look that told him she understood.

"Yes," she said; "I am constant. You can thank your stars for that, Ralph Warner."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

Julia Tempest laughed mockingly.

"Ah, I've interested you!" she said. "Well, I've only spoken the truth. Better for you to find me constant than that I——"

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She paused. He was watching her narrowly, almost apprehensively.

"What?" he demanded.

"Than that I—who know you so well—should go over to the enemy. Don't you think so, my lord?"

He forced a laugh and tried to appear at his ease.

"What could *you* do with the enemy?" he said.

"Ah, that is *my* affair," she replied. "Well, Ralph Warner, I have come to you to-night for the last time. Are you, or are you not, willing to redeem your promise to me of marriage?"

He opened his eyes in affected astonishment.

"My dear girl," he said, "you surely must be joking! You are a sufficiently woman of the world to be aware that such promises are never kept—*under such circumstances.*"

His tone was insolent in the extreme. In an instant, the colour had leapt to her cheeks, the dark, gipsy eyes flashed, and she was upon her feet, with clenched hands and heaving bosom, facing him where he sat.

"You cur!" she hissed. "Very well—let it be so! You have defied me—cast me off! Now you shall learn the fierceness, the fiendishness, of a woman's hate!"

Without another word she sprang to the window and was gone.

* * * * *

The sun was beating down on the bare, hot quarries whose stony strata have felt the print of the feet of so many of the central figures in the history of crime. A gang of men were busy hewing the stone from its primitive bed. Armed warders, watchful and alert, stood near at hand, ready to frustrate any attempt at escape. Yet they were not so vigilant but that some apparently trivial incidents passed by unnoticed. As one of the convicts went to his place, he stealthily turned over a piece of stone, and from it took up a small scrap of paper. Watching his opportunity, he read it softly to himself:

"*To-night — just before the whistle sounds—make a dash for the trees to the north-west. I will meet you and help you to escape. Don't fail.*"

That was all. The convict put the slip of paper in his mouth, chewed it to a pulp and spat it out.

"I suppose it's that girl I see hanging about here sometimes," he mused to himself. "I wonder who she is. I seem to recall her face somewhere. Well, whatever the mystery is, it's pretty evident she means to help me. So I'll trust her and make a dash for liberty."

As the day drew in, the sky became dark and threatening. The warders looked apprehensively at the approaching storm. A few minutes and the whistle would sound for the ceasing of work. Suddenly there was a cry, and a man dashed out of the rank of convicts and ran like a deer to the distant trees. Two shots rang out, but still the man ran on. In an instant, confusion took the place of order. The remaining convicts, sympathising readily with their escaping comrade, showed signs of rebellion, and the warders were forced to abandon the runaway. As speedily as they could, they marched the men back to the gloomy prison, and a party of pursuers were dispatched with all speed to recapture the fugitive.

Meanwhile the flying convict had reached the shelter of the wood. A girl was there, awaiting him. She carried a man's long cloak, and a soft, felt hat. Then they hurried on, the storm gathering about them as they went. Great drops were beginning to fall, and ere they had reached their destination the storm had burst above their heads in all its fury.

Some miles had been covered when they arrived at a small town, and the girl led the way to a house that appeared deserted. Entering, they went to an upper room, and threw off their soaking cloaks.

"Now," she said at last, "I am going to make you a proposal. I have helped you so far without imposing a single condition. But my future actions depend upon you."

The man looked at her curiously.

"Speak," he said. "I am ignorant both as to your motives and intentions. But I am in your hands."

Again the girl turned to listen. The faint sound of voices reached her, and for a moment she stood still, as though petrified. The voices sounded nearer, then ceased altogether. But she knew the men had not disappeared. Once more she turned and faced the fugitive, her finger pointing out of the window.

"Consent to marry me, and I will help you to escape," she cried. "Refuse, and your pursuers below shall capture you!"

The man uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Mechanically he put one hand to his brow.

"What is this?" he cried. "What purpose can you have in imposing such a condition?"

The girl's eyes flashed. But she moved a step nearer.

"Listen, Roy Conway," she said in low, concentrated tones. "I have that within my hands which will establish your innocence. I know something else, too, of which you little dream. My motive! Ah, you will learn that also—in time! But, tell me—what is your answer? Will you give me your word of honour to marry me, if I, on my part, establish your innocence and help you to escape until that innocence shall be proven?"

For a few moments Roy Conway made no reply. And then the sweet, trustful face of Laura Merrivale, as he had seen it that day in the crowded court, seemed to rise up before him, and he resolutely put away the temptation which beset him.

"No," he said, "I will not. I love another woman, and my faith is plighted to her. I cannot consent to marry you."

A grey shade came over the face of Julia Tempest, and she moved a step nearer the door.

"Choose ere it is too late!" she urged. "Remember, there is no retreat when once your recapture is effected. Once more—will you marry me?"

"I cannot. You must do your worst. But why have you helped me to escape, only to mock me thus? Who are you?"

But the girl was gone. As the wife of Roy Conway, sole heir of his dying uncle, she could have tasted a revenge such as would have contented even her. But he, too, had refused her, and her heart hardened again. Only as his promised wife would she consent to reveal all that she knew of the crime committed that dark night.

Recovering himself, Roy Conway moved towards the door. But footsteps were already on the stairs; and, a moment later, he was surrounded and again conveyed to the great prison where he had spent so many weary months.

* * * * *

Ralph Warner had just been up to his uncle's house to inquire into the condition of the invalid. For upwards of two years and a half the case had baffled all medical and surgical skill. During all that time there had been no change. An insensibility that was half death held the sufferer in its lethargic arms. But now a slight change was perceptible. There were evidences of approaching dissolution, and Ralph Warner was uneasy, though why he did not know.

He had turned into the wood not far from his own house, and his feet were leading him to a sequestered spot where once he was wont to meet the girl whom now he treated so indifferently. To his unqualified surprise, he found Julia Tempest, stretched upon the grass, her chin in her hands, and with an angry light in her black eyes. She looked up as he came near, and her lip curled disdainfully. Upon Ralph's face, however, dawned an expression of mockery that stung the girl into speech.

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"Ah!" she said bitterly. "You think you have it all your own way, Ralph Warner. But wait. My time is coming soon."

Ralph uttered a low, derisive laugh.

"I've been reading an account of the escape of one of the convicts at Portland," he said. "Fortunately they recaptured the fellow. The authorities seem to think the man was assisted by a woman, who later deserted him. It's a funny story and has set me thinking. If I remember rightly, you were away at the time?"

He looked jeeringly down at the recumbent figure of the girl. But Julia was on her feet in an instant.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

A different shade was stealing into Ralph Warner's dark face—a look of malevolent fury that almost transformed it. But the girl did not flinch.

"Look you," he hissed, coming close up to her. "You are playing a deep game, my beauty. But don't carry it too far, do you hear? I don't know how much, or how little, you know of my plans. But if you go too far, I'll treat you as I do all my enemies. At present you are only a silly little fool. Be content to remain a fool. It's the safest plan by half."

Not an eyelash quivered as Julia Tempest listened to the man's threat. Her blood was up.

"That I am not a fool you will very soon discover," she said defiantly, "and to your cost, Ralph Warner. You speak truly when you say you do not know how much or how little I know of your plans. And it is not my purpose to enlighten you. Only remember—a dark night is not always the safest time to choose for an adventure, since the darkness may conceal others beside yourself."

Ralph Warner stood motionless, rigid, speaking no word. What did the girl mean? But ere he could question her, she turned, and, with a rippling laugh of scornful triumph, disappeared among the trees.

For a moment he thought of going after her. But, with an oath, he turned on his heel and took an opposite direction.

* * * * *

There was stillness in the darkened room wherein lay the unconscious form of Andrew Conway. Two nurses moved silently about the room and, near the bed, stood the two eminent men—physician and surgeon—who were watching the case with so profound an interest. Signs of an approaching change were apparent, and both men waited eagerly for what should occur.

There was a stir in the doorway and Ralph Warner entered the room. As he came in, both doctors looked up with an expression of surprise. His face was white and ghastly, his hands were trembling visibly, and his eyes had in them a hunted look that made his face look still more drawn and haggard. But he paid no heed to the glances of the two men, and sat himself down beside the bed.

For two hours he never moved. His eyes wandered continually from the bed whereon his uncle lay to the window overlooking the lawn. At times, too, he appeared to listen, as though in dread, to voices beneath the window. And then the change, so long expected, so long deferred, came at last, and the sick man opened his eyes. Consciousness was returning. Slowly he moved his head, gazing from one to another in mute bewilderment. At last his eyes rested on the face of Ralph Warner and a look of unspeakable horror and aversion crept into the white face.

Suddenly the sick man made a violent effort and sat upright in his bed. His eyes were still fixed on the face of his nephew, and he pointed to him with one weak, trembling hand.

"Murderer!" he gasped. "Murderer!"

No one spoke. The words seemed to have petrified all present. A ghastly hue had crept into the face of Ralph Warner, but he never stirred. Once more the old man spoke.

"Murderer!" he gasped again. "I saw your evil face when you shot at me through the French windows of the study. Where's my boy—my nephew Roy? Where is he, I say? I was angry with him, but he's a good lad. Send for him. I want to see him and ask his forgiveness for striking him that night. Where is he, I say?"

Still no one spoke. Presently the surgeon, who knew the story of the crime as it had appeared in the papers, turned to the sick man.

"Sir," he said, "do you realise that you have accused of crime a man whom all the world believes to be innocent?"

He pointed, as he spoke, to Ralph Warner.

"I do," came the unfaltering reply. "That man is the man who attempted my life."

Quickly the two medical men made their examination. Finally the surgeon said.

"Mr. Conway, it is my painful duty to acquaint you with the fact that you have but a few hours to live. As medical men, we are able to testify that you are of sound mind. As a magistrate, it is my duty to ask you to make a formal declaration of the statement to which you have just given utterance."

He drew a table to the bedside and prepared to write. Ralph Warner rose hastily from his seat and made as though to leave the room. But the two men detained him, and he sank back into his chair.

Slowly the dying man dictated the story of that terrible night—the quarrel with his nephew, how he had struck him, and, in attempting to forcibly eject him from the room, he had torn Roy's tweed coat. And then—the sight of Ralph Warner's dark face through the glass, the glimpse of a revolver, a flash, and—darkness. And when the story was told, he affixed his signature and the pen dropped from his hand on to the table. His strength was failing. He lay back once more upon his pillow and his voice was feeble and husky.

"Roy!" he gasped. "Where is my boy? And my son Egbert? Will no one send for him?"

Egbert! Ah, there was but one man in that room who knew where Egbert Conway was. Search had been made for him by the dying man's solicitors, but, by a strange accident of fate, they had learnt nothing of that fatal tragedy with an Indian tiger.

And then the end came. Andrew Conway's feeble voice ceased, his eyes closed wearily, and the life that had flickered so long in the prostrate form went out for ever.

There was a great stir downstairs. A moment later the door was flung open and two police officers entered the room.

"We hold a warrant for your arrest, Ralph Warner, on a charge of wounding Andrew Conway some two and a half years ago. Also with the murder of Julia Tempest, from whom we have just obtained a deposition incriminating you."

Ralph Warner stood up. His knees shook and his face was livid with fear.

"I am ready," he said.

They turned to go. Suddenly there was a flash, a report, and the sound of a heavy fall. Ralph Warner, taking advantage of the momentary movement, had drawn a revolver and sent a bullet through his brain.

And Roy? Well, his prison career came speedily to an end. Release came to him when he almost despaired. And when at last the gates of the great gloomy gaol were flung wide open for him to step out again into God's sunlight, the first face that greeted him was the face of Laura Merrivale, smiling, yet with the tears in her blue eyes, to tell him again and again how she had always known he was guiltless and how dearly—how very dearly—she loved him.

So all's well that ends well, and Roy Conway and his sweet wife went at length to live in the great house where his uncle had lived so long. For Egbert's sad fate was discovered at last, and Roy came into all his uncle's great wealth.

Walter J. Mowbray.

THE RAPID REVIEW

No. 4

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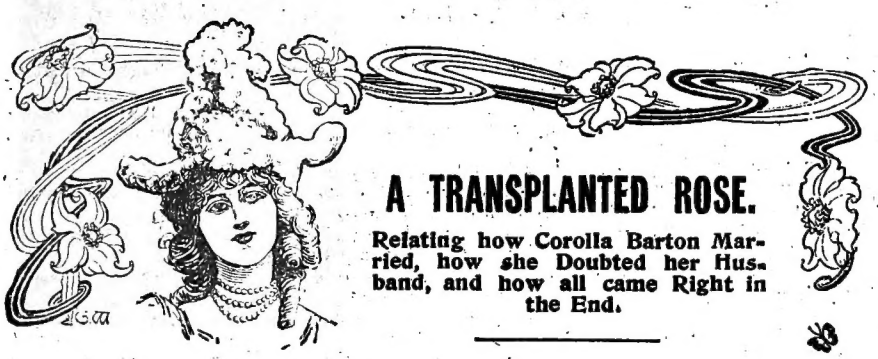

A TRANSPLANTED ROSE.

Relating how Corolla Barton Married, how she Doubted her Husband, and how all came Right in the End.

AFTER her father's sudden death, Fate threw Corolla Burton in the way of Mrs. Douglas, a wealthy American lady, who wished to engage an English governess to take back with her.

Corolla was a graceful, lovely girl, only eighteen years of age, and a blue-eyed, sunny-tempered creature. She had been thoroughly well-educated, and was too high-spirited to remain dependent upon her relations, so she looked naturally for a situation as governess.

"Mamma, mamma," cried little Gilbert Douglas and his sister Minnie, with their arms clasped round Corolla's neck, "please do engage Miss Burton—please do!"

Mrs. Douglas' mother instinct urged her to secure Corolla, f possible, seeing the children were so fond of her.

"But, my dear girl, how can I part with you?" lamented Mrs. Burton. "You are all I have in the world!"

"I know it, mamma," said Corolla cheerfully, and stroking the silvery hair while she spoke; "and I am going away to earn money for you. Mrs. Douglas is very rich, and will give me a large salary. By-and-bye you shall cross over to America and live with me."

Mrs. Burton had a quiet interview with Mrs. Douglas, and grew more reconciled. The lady seemed very kind, and Corolla would be happy with the children. America is not so far away in these days, and if anything happened unexpectedly, Corolla could easily return to England.

They had a pleasant passage, and, later on, were comfortably settled in the handsome home of Mrs. Douglas, who, finding Gilbert Lysle, her bachelor brother of thirty-five, still unmarried, invited Miss Carew, a second cousin of theirs, to spend some weeks with her, for the express purpose of bringing them together.

Miss Carew was a handsome, stylish woman of twenty-six, fond of dress and Society, and not at all averse to be brought within the sphere of her wealthy cousin.

Mrs. Douglas' worldly wisdom prompted her to keep Corolla out of the way as much as possible. "There is no accounting for men's vagaries," she told Miss Carew confidentially.

That lady was arranging some pink rosebuds with the soft white lace at her throat. Her ripe, lovely lips curled in scorn at the idea of the unformed girl, without a particle of style, or knowledge of Society, becoming her rival. But neither of the conspirators counted upon the extreme wilfulness of man.

Lysle suspected his sister's designs. With masculine contrariety he made a point forthwith of seeking the society of the governess. He joined her in her walks with the children, making a pretence of botanising and needing her aid; went into the schoolroom to hear them at lessons; volunteered to read Tennyson to her, and was soon over head-and-ears in love. She was so innocent and natural, so charming in her wild-rose loveliness, in such direct contrast to the women who had so long angled for him, that he was enchanted.

Miss Carew was superb and disdainful. Mrs. Douglas was exasperated. This was the cloud that had appeared dimly above her horizon when she engaged Corolla. She accused her now of artfully inveigling her brother, and of teaching the children to call "Uncle Gilbert" into the nursery. At this, Corolla's British blood was roused. She resented the injustice with a good deal of spirit. Then Mrs. Douglas threatened to pack her off home to her mother in disgrace. Corolla rose equal to this also, and signified her willingness to leave.

Mrs. Douglas over-reached herself, for Gilbert brought matters suddenly to a climax, by asking Corolla to marry him. She was surprised. She had not dared to believe that such a handsome, aristocratic-looking gentleman could care for her in that way. She had looked upon his attentions as merely friendly ones, and taken herself sharply to task when she found she was growing fond of him. Her face was dyed with blushes at the unexpected question. She did not find an answer readily.

"What do you say, little one? Will the English wild-rose bloom beside my hearth, keeping all its sweetness for me? Do you love me, Corolla?"

It would have been useless for her tongue to deny what her fair, blushing, happy face revealed so eloquently. He took her in his arms, and pressed his first kiss upon her lips.

They were married very quietly, went on a short honeymoon trip, and Gilbert installed his wife mistress of his well-appointed home, about a mile from his sister's.

For a while Corolla lived in a blissful dream.

At the first, she had written a glowing letter to her mother, inclosing his photograph. Before long she followed it by another. "By-and-bye you are to come out and live with us," she wrote. "I spoke of it to him one day when I could gather courage, and he said he should be pleased, if it would add to my happiness.

The first six months of their married life were very happy ones. They went but little into Society. Mrs. Douglas refused to countenance her brother's wife, and people looked upon the marriage as a sort of *mésalliance*. Lysle cared but little. He had reached the age when the delights of Society grew stale. Corolla was only too happy to remain in retirement. Lysle had short office hours in his place of business. These over, he hastened home to Corolla, caring only for her wifely welcome and sweet, shy kisses.

After awhile, Mrs. Douglas began to unbend a little, calling occasionally upon Corolla, and inviting her to spend the day with her. Miss Carew, being a relative, joined her, and before long came—upon Gilbert's invitation—for a three weeks' visit, seconded perforce by Corolla, who shrank from her, she knew not why.

Miss Carew was delighted. She had never forgiven Gilbert for slighting her. He would now have a chance to institute comparisons between Corolla's and her own beauty.

Corolla could not understand it, but somehow Miss Carew seemed to draw her husband away from her. She monopolised him in the evenings completely. She could talk well and brightly upon subjects of which Corolla knew very little.

She felt uneasy about this; then took herself to task. She must not expect to engross *all* his attention, as she had done hitherto. He must love her, else why had he married her? Besides, Miss Carew was his cousin.

One evening, while she was out alone in the garden, Mrs. Douglas called. Corolla had left Miss Carew and her husband in the drawing-room. She was aroused from her sad reverie by the voice of Mrs. Douglas.

"I knew how it would be. Gilbert is tiring of bread-and-milk diet. Men do such idiotic things for a mere fancy. If his wife hopes to retain her hold upon him, she must make him feel proud of her. Mere sentiment is short-lived."

"I wish I had the chance back again," Miss Carew said, in a low, resolute tone. "I would bring him to my feet."

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Corolla, hidden from their view by some foliage, felt the blood forsake her cheeks, and her limbs grow suddenly weak. What if their words were true! Gilbert was changed certainly. She had never before suspected that Miss Carew wanted to marry him. The thought made her heart-sick.

"He must have preferred me, or he would not have asked me to marry him," she thought.

But why were his attentions declining? Was he really growing tired of her?

* * * * * * *

Corolla stood by her open chamber window in the warm glow of the August sunset. She was not happy. A reserve was creeping in between her and her husband.

She heard voices below somewhere. By-and-bye her husband and Miss Carew walked slowly along a shaded path. From her elevated position she could see them plainly. They stopped, and sat down upon a rustic bench, apparently engrossed in conversation. While Corolla watched them jealously, he threw his arm over her shoulder; then bent his head, and kissed her.

Corolla drew back with a sudden revulsion of feeling. Her sadness changed into hatred of Miss Carew, and anger against her husband. A sense of isolation came over her—of being alone in a strange country, with even her own husband untrue to her. She dropped down on a low seat, and covered her face with her hands. A longing for England and mother swept over her.

"No love like mother-love," she thought, the trite remark coming home to her as it had never done before.

A servant tapped at the door, and gave her a letter, which had just arrived.

The letter read:

"*My health is failing rapidly. In a few weeks, at most, I believe I shall be at rest. I long to see you, Corolla. I cannot die in peace, without one more look at your face. You are all I have on earth, dear child! Cannot you come to me for a few weeks, that yours may be the last face I look upon before I go to meet your father?*"

In this strain the letter ran on, sometimes almost illegibly, as if the fingers were too weak to guide the pen.

Corolla dropped the letter in her lap wearily. There was a dull, aching pain at her heart. This, then, was the end of her bright dreams for the future. Her mother had figured in all of them; now she was to die. Corolla shuddered at the thought. In her first longing for sympathy her heart turned to her husband. But, no; her confidence had been shaken. *He* could not be her resting-place. She was utterly miserable.

"Mother—mother!" she sobbed. "I wish I could die with you!"

While she sat there her husband entered.

"What is the matter, my child?" he asked, in a tone of concern, sitting down beside her, and looking into her tear-stained face.

"Mother is very ill—I fear dying, and wants me to go to her," she said, in a voice that sounded cold and calm, as she passed the letter to him.

"My poor child!" he said, when he had read it, drawing her within his arms, and caressing her flushed cheek.

She shrank from his touch. The words of Mrs. Douglas and Miss Carew—the scene she had witnessed that night—were rankling in her mind.

"Do you feel that you must go?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. If I did not I should never have a happy moment. Poor, dear mamma! It was so hard for her to part with me, and now——"

"If you think it will be a comfort to both of you, I should advise you to go," he said. "I only wish my business would permit me to accompany you."

She looked up quickly.

"Are you quite sure it would not?" she questioned.

"It is simply impossible at present," he returned; "but I think I can arrange things so that you will not be unprotected."

"He would rather stay where he can be near Miss Carew," she thought bitterly, drawing herself away from his sheltering arm.

"The *British Queen* sails for Liverpool on Thursday," he remarked, after a few moments of thought. "I am acquainted with the captain. He is a capital fellow. I can give you into his care."

"Is it Captain Lester, of whom I have heard you speak?" she asked listlessly.

"Yes. Do you really want to go so soon? Shall you be able to complete your preparations? This is Tuesday, remember."

"I shall not need much preparation," she said; and so it was arranged.

She felt heart-sore because he did not take her in his arms, and protest that he could not part with her for so long a time. "One short month ago he would have done so," she thought.

She made her preparations with a heavy heart. She had the reticent pride that would not allow her to mention her doubts to her husband.

* * * * * * *

The *British Queen* was within fifteen minutes of sailing. Gilbert had introduced Corolla to the captain, and had left a handsome fee in the hands of the good-natured stewardess in her behalf. They were together now in her state-room for the last good-bye. A great wave of tenderness swept over her in these last moments. She clasped her arms about his neck tightly. It seemed to her like a farewell for ever. He, perceiving how nervous she was, without guessing the prime cause, tried to maintain a cheerful demeanour. His manner made her still more unhappy. "If he loves me, why does he not express more regret at parting from me?" she thought.

Lysle was not by nature demonstrative. Love's first ardour had surprised him into a lover's tenderness; now he was the careful husband, more anxious for her comfort than to overburden her with caresses.

"Good-bye, dear child," he said at parting. "It will not be long until we meet again. Keep up your courage!" And so they parted.

"I hope you are not allowing home-sickness to attack you, Mrs. Lysle?" said Captain Lester one day.

She looked up at him with a smile that he could see was a little forced.

"I believe it has, and is drawing me in opposite directions at once."

"Ah, you are divided between England and America, I see. One holds the mother—the other the husband. I suppose it is rather hard to determine which has the stronger claim. Well, we are having a quick passage. Don't be melancholy. In a few days you will have a sight of merry England if all goes well."

* * * * * * *

Corolla felt a warmth and glow about her heart when she looked upon the spires and roofs and smoke of Liverpool, as the good ship made the port.

It was a bright, sunny September day when Captain Lester bade her good-bye, having attended to her luggage and seen her comfortably ensconced in the railway carriage that was to convey her to her mother.

"I hope when I meet you again I shall be better able to thank you for your kindness," she said.

"No thanks are required. Good-bye again. God bless you!"

Corolla had sent a telegram; so when three hours later she alighted at the station her uncle was there to meet her.

"Prepare yourself to see her much changed!" he told her as they drove home through the village, past the churchyard, with its carefully-tended graves, over which flowers bloomed lovingly and birds sang joyously, while the slanting rays of the afternoon sun smiled in benediction, and kindled the church spire and the stained windows with its glow.

Mrs. Burton, in a soft grey dress, with delicate lace round her neck and wrists, was propped up by pillows in an easy-chair.

"Mamma—dear mamma! you will live many years yet," she whispered, entwining her arms about her lovingly. And

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she retired to rest that night under the dawn of this hope, and slept soundly until late the next forenoon.

"Tell me about your home and husband," her mother whispered; "it will rest me to hear you talk. It was the longing to see you that exhausted me."

Corolla had to give her minute particulars, and to mask her own unrest with a cheerful face.

That night in her room she told herself she must carefully guard every word and look. She longed for the privilege of laying her head upon her mother's breast, as she had done in childhood, and telling all her trouble. But it would not do. Her mother's last hours must not be embittered by doubts of her daughter's happiness.

Through the stimulus of Corolla's presence, Mrs. Burton kept up for some days. Then the reaction set in. She could not be removed from her bed. Corolla hovered round her, wearing a smile rather sad and pathetic, and soothed her last days lovingly.

The end came gently and sweetly.

"Kiss me, Corolla," she whispered. "You will come, too, before long, and we shall be together."

Corolla complied. Then, as she moved her fan gently, the mysterious change passed over the face, and it was still. Corolla laid down the fan, and a quiet awe stole over her. She could not remove her eyes from the sight. A sweeter smile than they had worn in life was settling over the features. She could not realise that it was death.

But after the funeral a dreadful loneliness settled upon her. Life stretched before her so long and so desolate. Her thoughts would turn involuntarily to her husband, only to be beaten back by the remembrance of her shaken faith. She had received a cablegram and but one letter from him, which seemed to her cold and unsatisfactory. She could not understand a half-way love. Her own was so fresh, genuine, unalloyed, that she expected the same from her husband.

"He would not care to soothe my sorrow," she thought. "Miss Carew has engrossed his attention."

She had no heart to leave England, yet she told herself she must go. The letter which was due from her husband did not come; but she had money enough for her home passage, and felt so wretched and unsettled, that she resolved to start.

"Corolla has some trouble on her mind, in addition to her mother's death," her aunt said to her husband confidentially. "If she has such a good husband, why isn't she more anxious to return to him? She has been here two months now."

Mr. Frothingham, Corolla's uncle, accompanied her to Liverpool. He saw her safely on board the *Peerless*, and sent a cablegram to her husband to that effect.

It was late in the evening when they sailed. Before they were fairly out into the Channel a thick fog rose. They lost their bearing. Some time towards morning the sleeping passengers were awakened by a terrific crash, the ship shivering and groaning like some human monster in mortal pain. They were on the rocks, not far from the coast, they judged.

The blow was fatal. The ship went to pieces rapidly. A fire broke out in the engine-room, adding fresh horrors. All was confusion. There was no chance to get the boats out. Some jumped overboard, in terror of the flames. There was a universal panic. Corolla afterwards remembered how, in the confusion, a gentleman had given her a life-preserver, secured one himself, and bidding her follow his example, had jumped overboard. Fear of the spreading, mounting flames had nerved her to make the plunge. The last she could recollect was of floating over the heaving waters, which were "dyed with an awful but glorious light"; while through the lurid shroud of fog that enveloped everything, she could hear the shouts and shrieks of men and women belonging to the doomed ship.

Corolla overheard a conversation that made her heart sick.

* * *

"And you think now she will really recover, doctor?"

"Yes; I think she will awake from this long, refreshing sleep to a new life. Her good constitution and your careful nursing have saved her."

"I am very, very thankful," Miss Newton said. She was a lady of middle age, with a pure, earnest face, from which all selfishness and passion had been swept away by a great, purifying sorrow.

Dr. Chudleigh looked at his watch. "I have an engagement at three," he said. "Good afternoon, Miss Newton."

They had been standing in the hall. She re-ascended the stairs, and noiselessly opened the door of a pleasant, roomy chamber. In one corner, on a low, white bed, Corolla lay, breathing softly, her senses all locked in the life-giving slumber. The furniture was tasteful; the windows draped with

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long lace curtains. A bouquet of hot-house flowers stood on a round marble table. The curtains of the windows near the bed were closely drawn; but across the room a square of sunlight lay on the soft drab-and-green carpet. Miss Newton sat down near the sunny window to wait. The doctor had said she would soon awake.

* * * * * * *

Corolla's eyes unclosed, wandered round the room, and closed again. Consciousness, confused at first, was returning. The unfamiliar room furnished no peg of association. Suddenly the fiery scene, which had burnt itself into her memory, flashed into recollection. In its light the foregoing events returned to her: Her dead mother—her sorrow—her husband—Miss Carew—Mrs. Douglas. How long had she been lying on that bed? Was she in England or America? She had a Rip-Van-Winkle feeling about herself.

She drew a long, deep sigh, which reached Miss Newton's ears, who stepped lightly across the carpet to her bedside. Corolla opened her eyes again, to meet the sweetly earnest face bending over her.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Among friends," was the answer, with a quiet smile. "Let me give you this," dipping a spoon into the glass of dark-coloured liquid which she held.

Corolla swallowed it quietly. It felt cool and grateful to her parched lips.

"Am I in England?" she asked, when Miss Newton had set down the glass.

"Yes, in Ryeport. You were found floating about on a life-preserver. Some fishermen picked you up."

"I remember," she said. "The *Peerless* went on the rocks in the fog—the fire broke out—I, with others, jumped overboard." She paused a moment. "This is not a fisherman's house?" she said.

"No, it is mine," returned Miss Newton, with a smile.

"How long have I been lying here?"

"Four weeks. You were insensible for a long time after they brought you ashore. Soon after you showed signs of life, fever set in."

Corolla improved rapidly. She was reticent about her past life, and Miss Newton did not ask many questions.

"'Corolla,' a rare, but very pretty name," she said, when she heard it. "Have you no message to send to your friends? They will be anxious."

"I have no friends who will care to hear. My mother died shortly before I sailed for America. My father is dead. I have neither brothers nor sisters."

Miss Newton detected the ring of pain in her tone. She said no more for the time.

When Corolla lay convalescent, a strange thought was shaping in her brain. The news of the loss of the *Peerless* had reached America. The papers had announced that only one man had reached shore, Miss Newton told her. Her husband would believe her dead. Why go back now, an unwelcome interloper?

"Gilbert could marry Miss Carew, and be happy," she thought. His attentions to her, that kiss in the twilight, were proofs to Corolla that he loved her.

The more she pondered, the higher seemed the barrier between them. The fact that she was his lawful wife, and had a right to his home and protection, if she could not command his love, had no weight with her. She must be everything or nothing to him. An inherited pride, which disdained to enter where she was not warmly welcome, furthered her resolve. "How foolish I was to accept his offer of marriage so eagerly," she thought. "I ought to have reflected."

The scheme seemed more and more practicable. Her aunt and uncle, with others, would think she was lost. She would be Corolla Burton again, and go out as a governess. She loved children. It would not be a heavy cross.

Miss Newton guessed she had an unhappy secret, and, out of kindness, made several attempts to elicit it. Corolla at last begged her not to question her, and asked her aid in procuring a situation.

"You can have a home with me as long as you choose," said Miss Newton.

"I have had a home with you too long already," she returned with a sad smile. "I love children. If I could get a situation as governess, I should be so grateful."

"After you are strong again, my dear, we will see what can be done; that is, if you think you will be better contented."

"I should feel more independent," said Corolla; and she added, "I hope to be able some day to repay your kindness."

"Do not mention it," said Miss Newton. "It has been a positive pleasure to me to have you here. I find all my happiness now in such things. Like yourself, I am without near relatives in the world. When I was not much older than you are, an act of selfishness on my part deprived me of a noble lover. With him went all that made life desirable. I was rebellious for a long time, but came back to life at last, to find that there was something besides self to live for. It is a luxury to me to make others happy. My life would be intolerable without it."

A few weeks later Miss Newton received a letter from a friend in Manchester, in which she mentioned that she was looking for a governess for her little Lulu. "I can send you, I think, a perfect treasure," Miss Newton wrote in reply.

Preliminaries were arranged. In a week Corolla was domiciled in Mrs. Erskine's cheerful home, with light duties, and treated in all respects as an equal. Miss Newton's patronage was all-potent.

This took place at the beginning of the New Year. Six months, that might have been happy ones had she been Corolla Burton in reality, passed over her head. Then Mrs. Erskine sickened and died. Lulu was motherless.

At Mr. Erskine's invitation an elderly aunt of his came to preside over his home. He begged Corolla to remain in charge of Lulu, who had grown warmly attached to her. Corolla was glad to comply. She shrank from going out into the world again.

* * * * *

"Miss Burton, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

It was a year since the death of Mrs. Erskine. The air was full of the tender sweetness of Maytime—the season when, according to Tennyson, "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

Corolla looked up into the face of the handsome young widower. Her face flushed hotly, then became very pale. She shrank away from him. In her surprise and agitation she had almost spoken the words, "I am a wife already."

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"Have I startled you? Perhaps I have been abrupt," he said, apologetically, not understanding the pained, scared look in her eyes. "Your sweet face has grown very dear to me," he went on in a low tone, "and my motherless child loves you. Will you not make us both happy?"

"I—I——" she commenced in confusion. "Please forgive me, Mr. Erskine. You must not speak of love to me."

He looked at her searchingly. She had never seemed to him to be a happy person. There was very often a shadowy unrest in the sweet violet eyes, a pathetic expression about the delicate mouth, while the roses in her cheeks had faded away.

"If you could love me a little, ever so little, I would try to make you so happy," he persisted, not sufficiently warned by her words. "We would go to Italy, and your roses would come back. I am afraid you are low-spirited, too. You have kept too close with Lulu."

He moved towards her. She lifted her hand with an appealing gesture. A low cry broke from her, then she left the room abruptly, leaving him standing there the picture of astonishment.

She went to her room. How her heart ached! Not because this man had touched it. Oh, no. His words had broken down the barriers of self-repression. They had opened the floodgates; and the love for her husband, which she had resolved she *would* crush out altogether, overflowed its imposed boundary. She felt a mad, unquenchable longing to see his face once more.

"It is my wife, come back from the dead!" cried Gilbert.

In what a false position she had placed herself! Palming herself off as a girl, she was, of course, open to offers of marriage; while she was a wife, with neither the right nor the inclination to listen to words of love.

To get away from there before Mr. Erskine could renew his pleading, was her first thought; her next was to go over to America quietly, secretly, and, without making herself known, see her husband again. "If I could see his face, and not be seen!" she said.

A tiny hope, which she scarcely dared whisper to herself, had sprung up in connection with this powerful reaction. Might there not be some flaw in the chain of circumstantial evidence she had woven? It was so easy to be mistaken. Might he not be yet mourning for her loss? This hope once admitted, the uncertainty was maddening. She had saved quite a big sum of money from her liberal salary. There was nothing to prevent her from going. She lay until nearly morning, revolving her plans, then fell into a light slumber.

The next day she sought Mr. Erskine, and told him, in tremulous tones, with averted face, that she must leave at once.

"Are you going away on my account?" he asked, seizing her hands gently, but firmly, to detain her.

"No—oh, no! I cannot tell you the reason I am going. I am very unhappy. If you are my friend, please do not question me."

He saw that he must desist.

"Will you tell me, at least, *where* you are going?"

"I would rather not," she said, and, seeing her distress, he would not urge her.

She spent the rest of the day in packing her trunk, and disposing of the things she did not want to take with her. Lulu was disconsolate, and hung round her tearfully. With tears in her own eyes, Corolla kissed her, and tried to comfort her.

Corolla journeyed to Liverpool. The speed of the iron horse seemed a snail's pace to her impatient fancy. She was fortunate in the time of her arrival there. A steamer was to sail that evening for America.

Safely aboard, in the snug state-room which she had been fortunate enough to secure, although so late in taking her passage, her thoughts flew back to the ill-fated *Peerless*. But all nervous fear was swallowed up in the one overmastering anxiety that filled her mind. When she made that resolve upon her sick bed, she did not fully understand upon what an unquiet and momentous path she had voluntarily entered.

The ship made a quick, delightful passage, and one fair morning in June it glided up New York Harbour. Corolla's heart throbbed violently as she stood on deck with others and looked once more upon the great city. Before twenty-four hours she would know the worst. Any certainty would be better than this consuming suspense.

The train steamed out through the early twilight into the suburbs, and stopped at the little wayside station of Heath. Corolla alighted and walked slowly along the platform. The memory of the day when she left there, a little less than two years ago, came back to her vividly. She was very quietly dressed, and a thick veil concealed her features. The same station-master was there, who, as he passed her on the platform, eyed her narrowly. She hurried along out of the glare of the station lights, and walked in the direction of her former home.

The shadows of the June twilight were fast deepening. The trees in the avenue loomed up darkly against the sky. A dewy sweetness seemed to enfold everything. The evening star glimmered in the west. The drowsy hum of happy insects sounded in her ears. She was surrounded by finest harmonies of nature. She alone was out of tune.

She reached the borders of the grounds, which were surrounded by a low stone wall, on the inside of which was a closely-clipped thorn edge. The gate stood open. She stole through it like a guilty thing, and ventured up the walk.

A step sounded ahead of her on the gravel. She shrank behind some tall-growing shrubs until it passed; then pressed

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on towards the house, which showed tall and imposing in the twilight. She was trembling in every limb. Her own heart had made a coward of her.

She drew nearer and nearer. The fountain murmured musically, as in the old, happy days. The outline of the marble Graces in the garden showed faintly. The air was full of the fragrance of roses and other odorous flowers of June. The sweetness sickened her.

A breeze stirred the leaves of the horse-chestnuts. They seemed to whisper:

"You have come on a fruitless quest. Another reigns queen of his heart."

A light glimmered through the half-closed blinds of one of the bay-windows of the drawing-room. Summoning all her courage, she tottered up to it. The couchant lions on each side of the broad stone steps in front of the house seemed to leer at her through the semi-gloom. She pushed aside the clustering roses and sweet-brier, wounding her delicate hands unconsciously, and looked in, for the curtains were undrawn.

The room seemed unchanged. The same tall, costly lamp stood upon the table, its light shining through the white globe, soft and subdued. A handsome painting of Mount Willard, with a blue, transparent mist clinging round its sides, hung opposite the window, as when she left. The easy-chairs stood here and there carelessly, as of yore.

She pushed nearer, to get a view of the sofa in the corner. Gilbert Lysle was stretched at full-length upon it. He was passing his hands slowly and thoughtfully through his hair, in the fashion she remembered so well. No one else was in the room. Was he really true to her? Still living alone and heart-whole for her sake? The faint hope that had brought her there grew stronger.

She half turned away, thinking she would go to the front door, and ring the bell. Her movement was arrested. A door was thrown open, giving her a glimpse of the spacious, lighted hall, and a girl entered with a beautiful child in her arms—of five or six months seemingly. He crowed with delight, and stretched out his chubby hands towards Gilbert, who sat upright at once, and took him into his arms. Corolla could not distinguish any words; but she saw him kiss and fondle the child, and toss him aloft in his strong arms. His child! The thought was agony. His, and not hers! The girl went out, leaving the child in the care of Gilbert Lysle.

A few moments later, a lady, with sweeping skirts, came through the open door. Corolla strained her eyes. It was Miss Carew, beautiful and stately as ever. Corolla felt a cold perspiration on her forehead, and the objects in the room seemed to dance before her eyes.

Miss Carew, or "Mrs. Lysle" now, Corolla told herself, walked to the sofa, and held out her hands towards the child, who made attempts to reach the diamond in her bosom, crowing all the time in baby fashion.

The desolate wanderer at the window saw it all. She had come across the seas in vain. Her husband had forgotten her, and that very soon. He *had* crowned another in her place queen of his life. She was the mother of his child. She remembered vaguely that she had intended to take the eleven o'clock train back to New York again, if her worst fears should be confirmed. She turned to leave the place, under cover of the darkness.

"No husband's kiss for me," she told herself hopelessly. But her trembling limbs refused to support her weight. Her will power forsook her. The starry heavens above her seemed fading into blankness. A deep groan burst from her lips; she reeled, and fell down among the dewy roses, crushing some of them into shapelessness.

The sound was heard inside through the open windows.

"What was that?" Gilbert asked hastily. He gave the child into the arms of his companion, and stepped through a side door that opened into the garden.

"Nero! Nero!" he shouted, for the dog had bounded out, and now with short, disturbed barks, was sniffing round Corolla's insensible form.

He procured a lantern, and went hastily out. Nero stopped barking, and began to whine piteously. Corolla's hat was pushed forward, concealing her face as she lay. He lifted her in his arms, and carried her into the house.

"A woman in a fainting-fit, I think," he said concisely, in answer to the startled inquiries of a lady with a pleasant, matronly face, who met him in the doorway.

He carried her across the room to the sofa which he had just left, and laid her down. Miss Carew stood speechless. The girl, with the child in her arms, looked on in open-eyed wonder.

"Poor creature!" said the matronly lady, stepping forward, and removing the hat and veil from the still, white face.

Gilbert Lysle looked, then started forward, and scanned the face closely.

"Good Heavens!—what a striking likeness!" came from his lips. Trembling, he lifted one delicate hand that lay limp and cold, and drew off the gold band that incircled one of the fingers. He scanned the inside a moment by the lamplight, then turned again to the sofa. "Corolla! It is my wife, come back from the dead! Corolla, darling, open your eyes; speak to me, your husband!"

The others drew near. The elder lady applied restoratives, only half understanding Mr. Lysle's strange actions. He seemed unconscious of their presence.

Miss Carew scanned the quiet face closely for a few moments, then left the room abruptly.

"The prize has slipped from my grasp again, just as I was on the eve of securing it," she hissed, in impotent anger. "What power has raised her from the dead, and sent her back here, with her hated doll-face and yellow hair, to mar my plans a second time?"

Under the influence of the restoratives, Corolla's white eyelids fluttered. She drew a long, deep, shuddering sigh, and her blue eyes unclosed wearily. Gilbert's face was very near hers.

"I—I could not help coming back," she whispered. "I was dying for one more sight of your face. I did not mean to faint. I will go away again, and let you be happy with her."

He thought her mind was wandering.

"Go away, my darling?" he said soothingly, while he stroked her cheek fondly. "Go away, when my heart has ached for you so long? Never again, while these arms have power to enfold you!"

"But the child?" she whispered. "Miss Carew is your wife now, isn't she?"

"Her mind is still wandering," he thought. The others had left him alone with her. "You—not Miss Carew—are my wife," he told her.

"But the child I saw in your arms?" she persisted, with a clear, steady look now in her eyes.

"My brother's child. He and his wife are on a visit here. Miss Carew is spending a day or two with us."

"And there is nothing to separate you and me."

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"Nothing," he returned, repressing, until she should recover her strength, the thousand questions that rose to his lips regarding the past two years.

Too much exhausted to question further, Corolla raised her arms, and drew his face down close to hers. They lay quiet for some time in a close embrace. Corolla's eyes closed. She had not dared to dream of such a glad reunion. Her heart was full of an unutterable content.

* * * * *

When she grew strong, there was a long talk, and many explanations. Corolla confessed all her doubts and fears from the beginning.

"How *could* you voluntarily stay away from me, if you loved me?" he asked.

"It was my foolish pride," she returned. "I knew I was not your social equal, and thought you had begun to realise and regret it. But, after all, I was not strong enough to maintain my resolve, and succumbed weakly."

"For which weakness I am very thankful," he said gravely. "I am very, very sorry that my little wife did not trust me fully."

"But their conversation in the garden; your attentions to Miss Carew; that kiss I saw you give her, which I supposed was one of many; your willingness to let me go away; your one short, cool letter, instead of writing to me every week!" pleaded Corolla. The reproof in his tone grieved her.

"I was not to blame for their idle talk. As regards the kiss, I remember, now, that Laura made some laughing, bantering remark, which caused me to do it. I now suspect she saw you at the window, and wanted to annoy you. I was willing to let you go to England, because I saw it was for your happiness. If my letter seemed cool, it was because I was very much worried about my business just then, and, as I have told you, I wrote others, which must have been lost. The coolness was on your side. I remember you repelled me more than once, at which I wondered."

"Forgive me," Corolla said penitently.

Viewing the matter in a new light, she felt ashamed of her too sensitive, jealous pride.

Mrs. Douglas and Miss Carew held a private indignation meeting over the—to them—untimely return of one they had deemed safely out of the way. They could not again disturb Corolla. Her two years' experience had taught her wisdom.

With her husband's approval, she dispatched two letters to England—one to Miss Newton, the other to Mr. Erskine, in which she told her true story. She was afraid she had compromised herself in their eyes, and wished to retain their respect.

Isabel Harrod.

"ARE you popular with the young ladies of your set?" "Yes, I flatter myself that I am. I can have the refusal of any of their hands in marriage." "Do you really think so?" "I'm sure of it. I have already received the refusal of several of them."

"Now, Tommy," said the spinster aunt, with theories upon the bringing up of other people's children, "now, Tommy," setting her small nephew down hard on the chair, "look me straight in the eyes." Tommy looked. Then, "What beautiful eyes!" he said. He was diplomatic.

SHE: "Did you ever study the question of aerial navigation?" He: "Yes, to some extent." She: "And from what you have read do you believe it possible that we shall ever fly?" He (with a side glance of anxiety): "I think I shall, Alice; I hear ominous footsteps overhead."

"YES, sir, I have come to ask you for the hand of your daughter." "For Mabel's hand?" "Yes, sir. It is a mere formality, I know, but we thought it would be pleasing to you to have me go through with it." "What's that—a mere formality?" "That is what I said—a mere formality." "And may I inquire who suggested that asking my consent to my daughter's marriage was only a mere formality?" "It was Mabel's mother, sir." "Mabel's mother? Then I have nothing further to say."

Your Editor Chats.

Your Editor's Wish

WHITSUNTIDE is generally one of the most enjoyable of our periodical holidays, and, provided the weather be fine, many of my readers will doubtless be travelling by train to country or seaside. They, of course, will be taking their Whitsun *Short Stories* with them, as there is no companion for a railway journey more delightful than this little paper. Nevertheless, there are almost sure to be fellow-travellers in the same carriage who have been unwise enough to neglect to purchase a copy, so I take this opportunity of reminding my readers that it would be a gracious and a kindly act on their art if they would, after having read *S.S.* from cover to cover, pass it on to one of those persons who have armed themselves with the best possible antidote against weariness on the line. In conclusion, I trust that you all will have the happiest Whitsun that your heart can crave for.

Competition Results.

NEXT week I shall publish the name of the winner of the guinea offered in connection with the Twelfth Unsolved Love Problem, "The Test of Ruth Lawson."

I also hope to be able to announce in the same number the result of the recent Signature Competition.

Next Week's Number.

READERS should note that the next number of *Short Stories*, dated May 28th, will be on sale in the country on Saturday, May 21st, instead of Tuesday, the 24th, as usual.

Empire Day.

NEXT Tuesday, May 24th, is the anniversary of the birth of our late greatly-beloved sovereign, Queen Victoria.

It is a Royal day and should be celebrated as such.

Here is a way in which you yourself can celebrate it and also help others to do so. Great efforts are being made by the organisers of the FRESH AIR FUND to collect a big sum of money on May 24th—Empire Day—so that a larger number of the poor children of the slums than usual may this year have a happy day in the country. All contributions received on May 24th will be kept specially for the "Empire Day" outings.

All amounts to go to this special fund should be sent, in envelopes with "Empire Day" plainly marked in the top left-hand corner, to the Hon. Sec. of the FRESH AIR FUND, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Your Editor.

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By Contract Sealed.

The Tale of a Borrowed Love.

THEY were sitting in the library of her home in Kensington. The warm glow from a tall lamp fell slantingly over her, and brought out the deep morocco greens and reds of a heavy portière behind her. He was sitting looking straight ahead of him. They were both silent. There was only the swishing, silky frou-frou of her skirt as she swayed one daintily-slippered foot back and forth with a pretty impatience.

"But, my dear child," Franklin said at last, very patronisingly, "it is absurd! Indeed, it would be quite wrong, you know, for me to pretend I was in love with you."

The soft frou-frou stopped suddenly. She narrowed her wide blue eyes and bit her lip an instant. Then she rose, went over, and sat upon a low chair in front of him, so as to meet his eyes.

"But it is only for a month. Just to make Tom jealous. Ah, please do!"

Franklin moved back uneasily in his chair and faced her eyes.

"But, my dear Miss Dorothy, how could I?"

She only continued to meet his glance with her great, wide eyes. He shifted uncomfortably.

"You see, I had my love affair when I was young. It would be utterly absurd for a man of the world like me to begin again—and on so youthful a plan," he added, with a self-pleased smile.

Franklin was just thirty. He did have a few grey hairs, to be sure, of which, together with his experience, he was vastly proud.

She did not answer. For a full moment she looked the other way, then she turned to him again, and, still fixing him with her wide eyes, said sadly:

"Here you have always professed such interest in me, ever since I was a child. You used to send me flowers ages ago, and you took me to my first ball, and all that—and now when I ask you a tiny little thing like this——"

"You know quite well," he said, very seriously, with his eyes on his boot toes—"you know quite well that I would be glad to do anything in the wide world to please you; but this idea of being deeply in love with you for a month! My dear child——"

She rose and turned away with impatience.

"Oh, as if I wanted you really to love me!" she said petulantly. "I only want you to pretend you do. You do take things so hopelessly seriously."

"And you do place a fellow so hopelessly difficultly," he said, drawing his brows down. "Come now, Miss Dorothy, do you really want me so very much to do it?"

"There now, that's a dear," she said, coming out of her pout instantly, and reseating herself on the low chair before him. "And I promise not to make it the least bit difficult for you. You will only have to lend, not really give, me your affection, you know. You will have to come to see me—well, we will say, four times a week, and you will have to look pensively at me sometimes—sometimes very pensively, the way Tom does—and—that's all."

"Miss Dorothy," he said slowly, with his eyes again on his boot toes, "it does seems such an absurd proceeding for a man of my years and experience! For a month to—why it seems such——"

"Yes," she interrupted quickly; "for only a month. That isn't much, is it? And of course there must be no hedging. You must promise! There now, don't object. I think we shall have to have a contract," she added, laughing a little.

She went to the little Louis Quinze escritoire, seated herself, drew out a sheet of note paper, opened it, and with great seriousness wrote something across it.

"There," she said triumphantly, holding it before him by the tips of the paper, "that is the contract. You must sign it."

He glanced over the sheet and saw written in her bold, girlish hand:

"LENT: *To Dorothy Marshall, for a period of one month, beginning on May Day, the undivided affection of James R. Franklin.*"

With great seriousness she dipped the pen in the ink and gave it to him, and stood over him very gravely while he signed it.

"You shall have this contract back this day month, at which time you will be released from it," she said, folding it carefully, and locking it in a small drawer of the escritoire.

When she turned to him again he was fingering his tie absently and looking into the fire.

It all seemed so absurd to him. He felt with a secret disgust for himself that he, a man of the world and of experience, was being easily outdone now by a wide-eyed, blue-eyed child of eighteen. To be sure, if he could help her with her love affair, why ought he not to do it? Tom Prosser was desperately in love with her already; and yet she had owned frankly that she wanted to make him jealous. That was a peculiar admission.

He looked up and found her looking at him with her wide, persistent eyes. He stopped fingering his tie, and rose to go.

* * * * *

Franklin thought it had been a somewhat trying and awkward evening, though *her* spirits seemed never to have failed for an instant. It was a night or so before a grand ball, and they were both calling upon her.

"You are going with me to the Cavendishs' ball, are you not?" Prosser said, rising to leave.

"No," she said indifferently, pinning a wilful lock of hair close against her temple; "Mr. Franklin is taking me, aren't you, Jim?"

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Franklin started uneasily. It was the first time she had ever called him "Jim."

"Yes," he answered awkwardly, "I believe you did wish me to go."

"How very stupid you were!" she said, after Prosser had gone. "Of course I did suggest your taking me, but you should not have given Tom that idea."

"Well, you should not have called me 'Jim,'" he said, a little sullenly.

"Don't you like it?" she said, laughing in spite of herself. "I thought you would."

"Yes; but somehow it was so sudden," he answered, still rather sullenly.

"Oh, don't say that!" she laughed again. "It sounds exactly as though I had proposed to you."

He was looking intently at his patent-leather boots. There was something peculiarly martyr-like and meek about his face as the lamplight, making deep shadows, fell across it. He raised his head suddenly. The fine lines of his face came out sharp and severe.

"Miss Dorothy!" he broke out, with a sudden fierceness. Then he stopped abruptly, and fixed his eyes again on the tips of his boots. The light fell slantwise again down his face. He was going to tell her that he could not keep to the contract, because it had grown hateful to him; because it seemed dishonourable for him to devote himself to making another man jealous, while he himself was not really in love with—— And then he stopped abruptly at the thought.

"Well?" she said, smiling, her face tilted upward like an impertinent flower. "I thought you were going to say something."

"Well, I don't like it!" he blurted out.

"You mean my calling you 'Jim'?" she said, lowering her head instantly, and with only wonder in her face and eyes.

"Good Heavens, no! Don't think that I mind that," he said. "It is the whole thing, the whole contemptible thing! For me to devote myself to making another fellow jealous and miserable when he is head-over-ears in love with you, and I am not in the least in——" He stopped abruptly. He hesitated at this each time, like an unwilling hunter before a six-barred gate.

Her lips were parted a little, and her whole attitude that of waiting.

"And I am not in the least in——" he repeated; and then he ran wide of his first thought, and wide of the truth as well —"and I am not in the least in the mood for such a thing."

"Oh!" she said. "You mean it has become a bore to you to come to see me so often."

"No," he said, coming back to the truth again—"no, it has not. But can't you understand——"

"Why, no!"—shaking her head—"not if it is not boring or disagreeable to you."

He stood before her and looked down at her a while without a word, then he turned and walked away from her. "That is just it. Can't you see? If I did not care a pin myself about you it might be easy enough. But each day I care more. And he cares, too. And don't you see what a mess it is?"

He came and stood before her again. The colour died down slowly from her face.

"Then you don't want to take me to the Cavendishs' ball?" Her brows were lifted a very little, her lips haughty, and her head tilted up proudly towards his.

"Yes, of course I do," he said inconsistently.

"Then I shall be ready at half past nine. We won't want to go before then," she said calmly, rising.

A moment later, when Franklin had gone, the flush came back slowly to her face.

* * * * *

It was Sunday, and Franklin and Dorothy were walking home together from morning service. In all the buoyant life of sound and colour and breathing sunlight they were strangely silent. Franklin's eyes were straight ahead of him, and there were stiff, severe lines about his face. It had grown white and a little worn during the past few weeks, so that the sharp, fine outlines of it were sharper than usual. There was something very child-like and grave about Dorothy's lips. Her face almost equalled his in seriousness, except that her eyes seemed to smile.

Franklin was bitterly reviewing the past month. He had gone into the thing solely for her sake, to make Prosser jealous, and now, what was the outcome? That he had succeeded only too well he was perfectly aware; for instead of making Prosser jealous, and through that jealousy more devoted; instead of drawing Prosser's affections more strongly to her, as he had meant to do, had he not succeeded only in drawing them from her? For Prosser, once well roused, once well jealous, had completely dropped Dorothy, and was now apparently consoling himself with the charms of Edith Barclay, a pretty little pink-and-white girl of a type that Franklin secretly despised.

In the midst of these thoughts he was conscious that Dorothy was bowing to someone. He was just in time to catch Edith Barclay's radiant smile and nod and to see Prosser's rather stiff bow as they brushed past him and Dorothy. He bit his upper lip fiercely and glanced down at his companion. Her face had flushed swiftly. A strange, miserable thrill came over Franklin and stopped and stuck with a dull little ache at his throat. His heart beat heavily.

What a miserable affair it all was! And to think that he had been the means of bringing unhappiness to her for whose least happiness he felt he would so gladly lay down his life. She never spoke to him nowadays of Tom Prosser! His face stiffened and the lines deepened about his mouth. There came to him with intense bitterness the thought that she was wasting her love on a man fickle enough to transfer his affections, almost at a moment's notice, to a girl, in no wise her equal, and for mere jealousy's sake. He noticed, with the same dull ache at his throat, the absent smile with which she greeted his occasional remarks. For her very pride's sake he dared not sympathise or speak to her of it. He walked beside her, realising that in that month he had learnt to love more dearly than he had ever loved before, than he would ever love again.

They had reached her home. He went slowly up the steps behind her and followed her absently into the library. The library had grown to be such a familiar, dear place to him. It was so natural for him to be there with her. She stood idly by a great mahogany table, pulling off her gloves. He stood beside her, looking down at her absently. She removed her hat and ran the hat pins through it.

"Deadly weapons!" she said lightly, drawing one out and running it back again. He held out his hand, not noticing.

"I suppose I must say good-bye?"

"Well, of course, the month is up," she said, without taking his hand.

"Yes, thank Heaven!" he answered.

She raised her brows slightly, and turned her head with a pretty, bird-like movement which brought him quickly to his senses.

"You know perfectly well why I'm glad," he said doggedly.

"No, I don't," she said lightly; "but, at any rate, it is hopelessly ungracious of you. During the month under my training you really ought to have learnt some tact. I am afraid the month has been of no use."

"You know I can't help saying what I mean," he said almost under his breath; "only, this time you have said it for me. You are right, the month has been of no use."

She coloured quickly up to the soft brown hair lying close to her temples.

"Yes," he hurried on; "you've got to let me speak of it. I know I've only hindered, not helped, you. I know I have only brought grief to you, whom to spare the slightest grief—you know what I mean. Don't try to misunderstand me"—for her eyes were wide and his lips opened slightly. "I have made him jealous just as you wanted I should."

"Yes?" she said, as though waiting for him to continue.

"Yes, and you know what I mean—you know just what a mess I've made of it. I've overdone it; it has gone too far.

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And I didn't have the honest decency to get out of it long ago!"

"What do you mean?" she said very gently, still running the hat pin in and out.

"Oh, you will make me say it, will you?" he said fiercely, and gaining courage now that her eyes were lowered. "Well, I've made him too jealous, and now, like the fool he is, he doesn't care a fig for you."

She raised her eyes, glanced thoughtfully about the room from one thing to another, then at last her glance found his, and she smiled.

"Why, of course he doesn't," she said gently, "and I am glad. That is just it."

"Oh, you brave little thing!" he said, with a thrill of pity in his voice. He had a strong impulse to stoop and fold her closely in his arms. "Don't I know how brave you are! Haven't I seen you trying! But, my dear, a man—you can't deceive a man of my experience."

"I see now what you mean," she said thoughtfully, after a long pause. "And you really thought I loved him? You really thought his waning love was breaking my heart?"

She sat down on the arm of a little low chair, then she looked up at him brightly and continued:

"Why, don't you know, if I wanted Tom's love now, it would take ten, perhaps fifteen minutes to get it back. That is just why I asked your help—because I did not love him—because I do not love him—because I—I love someone else. You see," she hurried on, "I wanted to let him down as easily as possible. I knew the best way to do that was to touch his feelings, to rouse his pride, to make him jealous. I have heard him say he considered it beneath a man's dignity to fight chances with another man for love. He does not love me now; no, of course not; nor does he suffer; that is better still."

She paused. Jim Franklin was looking down at her with a peculiar, half dazed look. She laughed lightly.

"It is so funny! And you thought I wanted you to help me make him jealous so he should love me more. Ah, but that would have been so superfluous, for at that time he was loving me with a changeless and eternal love, you know."

Jim did not answer; he did not even see the funny side of it all, nor smile. He had dropped down into a big armchair, and sat with his head bent. When he looked up his face was white and tired.

"I see," he said slowly; "I am a fool. I am glad I was so mistaken. I can't imagine how I ever thought you need try to win any man's love. But it doesn't much matter. Things are no better as they are. And after all, the month has been of no use—to me, at least. You have accomplished your purpose, and—you love someone else; and I—you know what I mean. I have no purpose now the month is up. You know—you have known since the night of the Cavendishs' ball. In helping let another fellow down easily, I've cut myself pretty badly, that's all. Don't say anything, please!"—as she began to speak. "I won't permit you to say anything. I won't make it hard for you. I know it would pain you to hurt a fly. If you were anxious to let down easily a man who could forget you like that, I won't bother you with myself. Good-bye! You must not think I suffer so much. And yet"—he folded her hand in both his—"and yet, Dorothy, you must know I can't help suffering deeply. I can stand it—just for the sake of loving you. Don't worry over a fellow like me. Good-bye, dear." He stooped and pressed his lips to her hand and left her.

Astonished and dismayed, she stood with the colour dying out of her hot cheeks. For an instant only she was irresolute, then with a swift movement she followed him, reached him just as with bent head he was stepping into the hall, and with a quick, girlish impulse took his hand and led him back into the library.

"You shouldn't have blundered so badly, and you were stupid, of course, not to see, but I don't mind. I've not given you the contract yet; you must have that back before you go."

Her perfect self-control seemed leaving her. It was he who was perfectly calm now. She sat down at the escritoire and unlocked the drawer, and took from it the paper.

"You were to be released to-day."

She was signing her name hurriedly.

"There is no use releasing me. I understand—I know I am no longer needed." Taking the paper she handed to him, he began slowly to tear it.

"Oh, don't!" she pleaded, stopping him. "Read it over first."

"And be released, and then try to forget everything," he said bitterly.

He opened the paper and glanced over it.

"*Lent: To Dorothy Marshall for a period of one month, beginning on May Day, the undivided affection of James R. Franklin. Which is herewith returned.*—"DOROTHY MARSHALL."

"Ah, Dorothy," he said, turning to her passionately, "what need of releasing me! For I shall never be free again! Yet for your happiness I shall try to forget. But at my years—a man of my——"

"Oh," she gasped, half laughing, "but don't you *see*? Oh, you *are* stupid. Don't you see?"

There were tears in her voice.

He glanced over the paper more carefully, then keenly at her an instant. The tears had followed swiftly into her eyes.

Then a sudden light came into his face, and he took her in his arms.

"Oh, Dorothy!" he said, kissing her many times.

Ralph Burdett Elliott.

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A BID FOR FORTUNE.

Telling How a Clever Scheme was Frustrated.

"THERE seems to be too much work on this job; it isn't worth the trouble."

The speaker threw away the half-smoked cigar in disgust. He was about twenty-five; he had an attractive appearance, and was called good-looking by some and handsome by others. To those better acquainted with human nature, however, there was at times a something in his face that tended to mar the first impression. His name was Lester Mayle, and he was in the company of two other men, one of whom was near enough his own age, while the other was forty at least.

"Not enough in it?" echoed the older man, John Waller. "Well, it means five hundred pounds between three of us, and that's equal to three pounds a week for a whole year. If this thing takes a month to work, we can lie low for the next eleven. That's good enough for me!"

"I'd be satisfied," said the third man quietly. His name was Harry Bennett. "But Lester is more aristocratic. I say, my boy, can you do anything better for the present? That's the question, as Shakespeare says!"

Lester Mayle twisted the ends of his moustache impatiently. "I suppose I cannot," he observed, after a pause. "Yet I feel like higher game than this. Well, it comes to this: Harold Gainsford fetches the cash from the bank on Friday afternoons in order to pay the men at the boot factory where he is assistant manager; every fourth week the amount is heavier, it is five hundred instead of four hundred, because certain salaries have also to be paid and other current monthly expenses met. We take him in hand on the fourth Friday, and relieve him of his burden!"

"That's it," said Waller complacently. "It is easy enough, but the time and trouble necessary to carry out the task come in through finding out the details and in waiting for the most favourable Friday. That's all. You're too impatient, Lester."

"On the whole, you have had less work to do than either of us," interposed Bennett, just a little tartly. "You have had the easy part of discovering details connected with the banking arrangements of the firm, which you could do with your aristocratic appearance; but we have had to loaf about and make arrangements under less easy conditions."

"Then I ought to have the lion's share of the spoil!" laughed Mayle grimly. "I have an aristocratic appearance to keep up."

Bennett would have retorted angrily, but Waller interposed: "That will do. Lester has a fit of the blues to-day; they are growing quite common. Each man does his work and shares with the others. Let us have a game of cards."

Lester sat moodily staring at nothing through the window of the hotel. All three men were well dressed and would have passed for men endowed with fair means. They were living in good style, and they calculated that their money would hold out long enough for their purpose. They had changed their lodgings during the "investigation period," as Waller termed it, more than once, going from town to village and so forth, in order to conceal their doings. Mayle looked up with a bored expression as Waller began to handle the pack.

"You two can play, I don't care about it. Look here, are we bound to stay in Northampton any longer? Haven't we collected all the data we want? At any rate, I think I have done all I can do, and we must wait a solid week. Can't we look round elsewhere?"

"Exactly," replied Waller. "Bennett and I have a little more to do, but we can leave to-morrow. Then we make our appearance on the scene again on Friday next; we meet at the appointed spot at the appointed time."

"I'll wait till then," said Mayle, picking up a London morning paper. "I've got a hazy scheme floating in my head which may bring us more money than this. You chaff me about aristocracy, but I am connected with a titled family, and it occurs to me that there may be something to be got out of it."

He began to read, but within two minutes he laid the newspaper down with a whistle.

"Look here, you fellows," he cried. "Sir James Langford, Baronet, is lying dangerously ill; so is his son; and both are suffering from blood-poisoning, due to something eaten at a foreign hotel. They have just come back from the Continent, and were taken ill on the way."

"What's Sir James Langford to do with us?" asked Waller.

"Just this," went on Mayle. "Neither father nor son is likely to recover; it's about a hundred to one against it, according to this paper. There are no other sons, and—and the successor to the baronetcy will be a son of another branch. *I* am a son of another branch, but I know that there is someone in front of me, if he is still alive! Query: Is he still alive?"

"What's it worth? Is the family rich?" demanded Waller.

The players had thrown their cards on the table at this interesting intelligence, and gazed curiously at Mayle, who was in a brown study. His brows were knit; he was searching the recesses of his memory. Presently he banged his fist on the table with an exclamation which need not be reproduced.

"It's a strange coincidence, but I feel positive of it!" he cried. "That clerk, Harold Gainsford, must be the next-of-kin! And I come after him. I wonder if he knows it? I wonder if any of them know it just off-hand?"

"Pity it isn't you!" growled Bennett. "What's the rent-roll?"

"Ten to twelve thousand a year!" said Lester Mayle, as coolly as he could, looking meaningly at Bennett. "If I were only the next-of-kin instead of being next after that!"

"Oh, well, it's no use worrying about it. It's your luck, said Bennett, picking up the cards again. "Perhaps they won't die, after all."

"Perhaps not," agreed Mayle, with additional moodiness, but there had been a rapid exchange of glances between him and Bennett which had escaped Waller's notice

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The game ended, Bennett said he would go for a stroll; it was a cold night, bitterly cold, but it would freshen him up before going to bed. Waller expressed his intention of going into the smoking-room, while Mayle said he would go to his room and might go out for a stretch in a few minutes. Thus it came about that Bennett and Mayle met in a quiet street outside the hotel.

"Well?" inquired Bennett significantly.

Lester Mayle glanced round fearfully.

"If it should turn out as I think, and the Baronet and his son should die, then Harold Gainsford would take the title, changing his name to Langford," returned Mayle, "unless——"

He paused. His lips were dry; he had never dared to go so far as this, even in thought. Robbery and swindling were his limits, so far.

"Unless, in the scuffle that ensues next Friday, he gets an unlucky knock on the head?" concluded Bennett. "Well, he might get one, if I were paid well enough for it! What's it worth?"

"It would have to be done very cautiously," declared Mayle, with pallid face.

"What's it worth?" demanded Bennett impatiently. "*I* say five thousand a year for three years!"

Mayle protested that it was too much, and Bennett turned fiercely upon him.

"Then do it yourself. Think it over, and decide to-morrow."

They parted, for the simple reason that Bennett left his accomplice. Mayle pondered the matter; he did not sleep a wink, but tossed about in bed, thinking it over. He saw all that it meant; riches and ease, instead of plotting and scheming with the police ever in the background, and a prison just a little more in the background. As he meditated, his fears left him; the plan seemed to be safer and easier, and when he met Bennett again his mind was made up. It was a contract. It only remained for Mayle to ascertain that Harold Gainsford was really the successor, and to see if the Baronet and his son died.

Mayle went up to town and made inquiries; he returned on Tuesday, satisfied that there was no hope of the son's recovery, and very little chance of the father getting over it. As for Harold Gainsford, his kinship was also certain.

Already the newspapers were speaking of the missing heir, for the history of the different ramifications was not so well-known to others as to Mayle, who had traded on his relationship for the purpose of getting various sums of money from the Baronet.

All Mayle's scruples had disappeared; he was cool and collected once more, and entered into details with Bennett as calmly as if planning a trip to Brighton. Waller was the obstacle, but Bennett undertook to take him in hand. Waller was likely to be squeamish.

"So that's settled," said Bennett. "Waller will be off with the cash, while we attend to the man."

But the best laid plans go wrong, and something happened which had not been foreseen.

That very evening Mayle slipped over a piece of orange-peel carelessly thrown on the frosty pavement; he fell heavily and broke one of the small bones of the left leg. He was taken to the infirmary, where he was detained. And that piece of orange-peel changed the destinies of several persons.

His leg was set and bandaged by a surgeon, who gave him a sleeping draught. In the morning he felt better; the pain had almost disappeared, and his chief discomfort was that he would be confined to his bed for three weeks or so—and how would his plan go on? Bennett, on receiving a message, visited him, and assured him that all would be well.

"Waller will help me, as you are laid aside; don't fear," he said.

Mayle settled down to wait, it having been arranged that neither Bennett nor Waller should visit him again lest suspicion should attach to Mayle after the—the event of Friday.

Mayle found the time hang heavily, but he tried to pass it comfortably by day-dreaming. He had no mind for reading. What a change it would be when he was Sir Lester Mayle Langford, Baronet. It pleased him, delighted him. He forgot all the probable awkward points, and thought only of the advantages. He would marry——

"Are you comfortable?" asked a sweet voice by his side, and he turned with a start to see a young nurse standing at the bedside.

"I knew you were not asleep," she told him, with a smile. I saw your eyes opening and shutting occasionally, and I thought you were dull or uncomfortable. Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you, nurse!" he replied in a hesitating voice.

How sweet she looked, and what a soothing voice she had! She was a born "ministering angel." The face was not beautiful; some would have felt disinclined to describe it as even moderately pretty; yet it had a charm all its own. She seemed to bring peace with her.

"Let me shake your pillow," she said; "it makes it so much more comfortable!"

She raised his head and turned the pillow, after shaking it up a little. Only those who have spent days in bed know how soothing is this simple process. Nurse Rodney understood.

"Shall I read a little to you?" she inquired. "We have less than our complement of patients here now, and I am not busy just at present."

It was so pleasant to listen to her voice that, although he did not wish to hear anything read, he answered in the affirmative, because he liked to hear the sound of her voice.

So she read to him, and he was sad when she left his bedside. He watched for her to come round the ward, and his eyes followed her wherever she went. She noticed his attention, and it pleased her to think that she was soothing his pain—for, in order to enlist her sympathy and get her often to his side, he had pretended that his leg did cause him pain and great discomfort at times.

When she retired from duty and gave place to a night nurse, he turned over in vexation at the nature of things and went to sleep. He was surprised to find what a hold she had obtained over him and how empty everything appeared when she was gone!

He looked for her in the morning, and she came to him as soon as she entered the ward, asking him if he were feeling better.

"Yes," he replied, his face brightening. "I shall soon get well if you could stay here all day!"

"Oh!" she laughed merrily. "What would the other patients do?"

"They do not want you as I do!" he said warmly. "It does me so much good to have you near me. You are so good yourself that—well, it makes me feel that I am a bad lot!" He blurted out the last clause before he was aware of it.

She had moved towards the foot of the bed during the first portion of this short speech, believing that he was about to pay some compliment to her appearance, but she returned on hearing the finish.

"I hardly think that you are treating yourself fairly in saying that!" she remarked gravely. "Of course, not one of us is as good as he or she ought to be, and you must not speak as if I were entirely good and you were entirely bad. Now, you must rest! I will come again soon."

She saw that he was agitated and she left him.

"It's true!" muttered Mayle sadly. "I see it now that I am face to face with a woman who is good! I've been a bad lot, and how can I expect to make a girl like that love me? Many girls would marry for a title, but she wouldn't! She's too good to do that! Well, I'll enjoy her society while it lasts, and then—oh, then I'll go my own way!"

He laughed mirthlessly, and looked about once more for the sweet-faced, sweet-voiced, sweet-tempered nurse!

She came to him several times, and he engaged her in conversation. She asked him questions about himself, following his example in this, for he had put leading inquiries to her. He could not tell her much, and he concealed his

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family history so far as the baronetcy was concerned. She was an orphan. And so the day passed, and Mayle remembered with a start that the following day was Friday, the all-important day for him!

He slept fitfully that Thursday night, and he felt sorry when morning came, for he half-dreaded to meet those tender eyes of Nurse Rodney! He tried to hide the fact from himself, but he could not! He was guilty of plotting to rob and kill a fellow-creature for his own advancement! How could he face this girl?

She came to him, just as sweet as ever, and he steeled himself against the reproaches of his own conscience so that he might enjoy her society. She was impelled towards him

"I had forgotten that I still had it on!"

He stifled a pang of jealousy that shot through his heart.

"You must tell me about him! We are good friends, yet you have not told me that!" he cried.

"Oh, there is nothing to tell!" she smiled in reply.

"But I want to know his name and something about him!" he urged. It seemed to him that he had a right to know. "Please tell me!"

She told him, just to pacify him. "His name is Harold Gainsford," she said, "and he is assistant manager in a boot factory in one of the places outside Northampton, about half a dozen miles away, you know. That is all!"

All! Heavens, was not that too much? Harold Gains-

She waved the flaming newspaper on high, to attract the attention of the driver of the on-coming express.

by a subtle power which she could not then understand, but which she afterwards recognised as that of the Divinity that shapes our ends, as Shakespeare puts it. She read to him; it was short, but a pathetically beautiful story of doing right at all hazards, and he realised that the girl who sat near him was one of those who would act thus. "And what of me?" he asked himself; in reply there rose in his mind the picture of the brutal attack on Harold Gainsford!

As she rose to leave him, he caught sight of a ring on the third finger of her left hand.

"You are engaged?" he queried involuntarily.

She blushed rosily, and slipped off the ring.

"I do not usually wear it when on duty," she explained.

ford, the man whose death he was encompassing, was this girl's affianced husband! He, Lester Mayle, who had learnt to revere this girl for her goodness, was bringing desolation upon her!

She hurried away from him, and he lay in his bed a prey to the most terrible feelings. If he allowed Gainsford to be sent to his doom? And yet, how could he prevent it without laying himself open to a charge of attempted murder? And could he save Gainsford, even if he were prepared to suffer himself?

She did not come near him again till after dinner, and then it was to chide him for not eating his portion.

"I believe you were sulking because I didn't come!" she said, holding up a warning finger.

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"Do you know if Sir James Langford and his son are recovering?" he asked suddenly. "You have seen the case in the papers?"

"Both have succumbed!" said the girl, shaking her head sadly. "It is dreadful, is it not?"

No reply. Mayle was thinking. If the son had lived and the title had not gone to Harold Gainsford, he (Mayle) might have tried to stop the crime; but now! A big rent-roll and ease awaited him!

Ease? He glanced at the girl, and there flashed across his mind the thought of what it would mean to her. How could he expect ease when he would be for ever haunted by that face? He seemed to see her pointing him out as a murderer! He shrank from her, and she noticed the movement.

"What is it?" she asked.

"This," he cried suddenly. "Harold Gainsford will be attacked on his way from the bank with the money this afternoon! I am one of those concerned in the crime! He will be robbed, then killed!"

A scream of fear came from her lips.

"Oh, what is this you are saying? Tell me, tell me! Oh, Harold!"

He told her all, as she knelt by his bedside. It was nearly three o'clock; the winter day was drawing to a close and darkness was falling. Harold would be on his way back to the factory on his bicycle, and he would meet this awful fate. In the light of present knowledge, it seemed like tempting Fate for him to do this bank business alone, yet he had done it for more than a year, and nobody had dreamt of danger. It was exactly the fact of this assumed security which had given Mayle and his accomplices their opportunity.

"I must try to save him!" she panted, pressing her hands to her side. "I will try, I will try! Harold, my Harold!"

Like a flash she was gone. Out in the bleak air, clad only in her simple nurse's costume, and after a hasty word to the matron, she sped towards the spot indicated by Mayle. Hurry as she might, she could not reach it under an hour; she would be too late to avert the tragedy, she was forced to realise that, but she went on, on! Perhaps she might find him alive!

At length, footsore and exhausted, she reached the place She could find no trace of Harold, so she went on in the direction he must take, which was towards the railway. In a bend of the road she came upon the damaged bicycle, but Harold was not there! With eyes that burnt for lack of the tears that would not come, she passed on. Over the low stile that kept people from the railway line and on the track. She knew that Harold had avoided a long detour sometimes by lifting his machine over this stile. By the side of the metals she gazed up and down the track in the darkness, and her heart stood still as she saw some dark object lying right in the four-foot way! A moment later she was kneeling by this object. It was Harold, insensible, his body right across the metals of the up-line! And in the distance she heard the faint sound that denoted the approach of the up-express from Rugby.

Harold was alive, but death in another form awaited him. She tried to lift him, but he was a strong, heavy young man, and he lay like a log! She herself, never muscular, was now exhausted by her hurried journey and by grief. She found her strength unavailing—and the train was coming, coming! She could hear the noise a little more distinctly!

With a cry of despair she sprang up. A newspaper lay near the track, dropped probably by Harold's assailants. An idea had seized her!

She usually carried a box of wax matches with her. She struck a match, set light to the newspaper, and waved it aloft, standing right in the track.

The driver of the on-coming train, keeping a good look-out, saw a strange light suddenly spring into life right in his path. He put on the screw, and it seemed to him that there was borne to him on the wind that beat against the engine the appeal:

"Stop! Oh, stop!"

The train was brought to a standstill within a few yards of Harold's inanimate figure. The passengers got out of the carriages, and the utmost consternation prevailed for a few moments. It looked like attempted suicide, but Florrie Rodney tottered up and gave her explanation.

"We will take you two to Northampton Station and give you over to the station master!" said the guard. And this was done.

Harold was alive and very little hurt. He had been knocked senseless and then dragged on to the line. His death would have appeared to be suicide through fearing to face the consequences of losing the money. It was a clever scheme, but it was frustrated by the influence of a good woman over a bad man, and by the heroic conduct of that woman.

Bennett and Waller were never caught, but the money was quickly replaced by Harold Gainsford when he came into the Langford baronetcy. Mayle was the only one who suffered; he ought to have been prosecuted for attempted murder, but both Harold and his sweetheart thought that repentance was worth something, so they allowed it to be supposed that Mayle was concerned only in the robbery. They would have liked to get him off the consequences of that piece of wickedness, but the law stepped in. However, Mayle got off lightly with twelve months' imprisonment, and when he was liberated, he received from Sir Harold and Lady Langford a sum of money that gave him a fresh start in another country, and they promised him an annuity if he lived well.

The engine driver, too, came in for a gratuity that made him stare, but Sir Harold and his sweet wife thought that he should be well rewarded for his promptitude in paying heed to the strange signal.

G. Merriam.

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"Oh, Ralph, all afternoon? One whole afternoon all alone without a soul in this terrible place to talk to——"

"Can't you read, dear?"

"Yes, and make my eyes and head ache. It's perfectly provoking of your brother to fall ill just while we're on our honeymoon. He should have more consideration. Ralph, there's the carriage; you'll whip up the horses, dear, won't you? Oh——" and the poor little bride was alone, with the prospect of a lonely afternoon to herself; which prospect, in a large hotel in a town where one doesn't know a soul, and when one is on one's honeymoon, is not an enviable one, as any unbiassed person will admit. The bride of three weeks sat down in a hopeless sort of way on the broad verandah overlooking the hotel grounds. She wearily turned over the list of guests, which an attentive waiter had put into her hand, without the least sign of interest in its contents. Suddenly an exclamation escaped her.

"Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Lonsdale!" she said, half aloud. "Mrs. Lonsdale! So that is the reason of his silence, and here I've been tormenting myself about him—picturing his grief at my fickleness, his anger, his despair—only to find him married, in the same hotel in which I am spending my honeymoon. Oh, Cliff, what a goose I've been to spoil my new happiness by worrying over you! I might have known that the affection of light grey eyes and fair hair wouldn't stand the test of a two years' absence from the beloved object, any more than—than a schoolgirl of seventeen knows when she is really in love. What fun it will be to meet him! Some confusion on both sides—mutual congratulations—'Allow me to present my wife.'—'Mr. Lonsdale, my husband'—perfectly glorious! Oh, I can see it all!" And leaning back in her chair, Edith shut her eyes as if to enjoy the scene in her mind's eye.

When she opened them again the look of amused enjoyment gave place to one of surprise, for a few paces away from her, leisurely smoking a cigar, stood unmistakably the man of her thoughts. She started up. Turning at the sound, the object of her gaze beheld the girl whom of all persons on earth he was least anxious to see. Edith stepped towards him with outstretched hands.

"Why, Clifford Lonsdale!"

"Miss Noble!"

While on her face was a look of pleasure, and a gleam of mischief, too, on his was expressed amazement mingled with embarrassment. Her quick eye and ear took in the situation at once.

"I've the advantage of you, dear old chum!" was her mental ejaculation. "I know your little secret, and mine is safe—until Ralph comes back." Mr. Lonsdale, hastily throwing away his cigar, took her proferred hand, while the embarrassment deepened on his face as she gave his hand a soft pressure, and said with a well-feigned little accent of tenderness: "Oh, Cliff, I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you!"

"Why, Edith, who in the world would have thought of seeing you here?" he managed to exclaim.

"And who you, sir? I'm overcome with astonishment. But I'm perfectly delighted to see you, too. I'm all alone this afternoon. My guardian angel"—"if he wants to think I mean my chaperon, it's not my fault," she whispered to her conscience—"had to go and see an invalid brother, and I didn't know what I could do to pass the time. But now that Fate has so kindly sent you in my way, you must, you positively must amuse me. And to think that I haven't seen you for three whole years! I've so much to tell you and ask you that it will take hours! And these beautiful grounds have just the loveliest places, where we can be all to ourselves. Do you see that large tree? Let's go there."

Lonsdale helplessly followed the pretty tyrant, with a remorseful thought of his bride left alone upstairs with a blinding headache. He turned to his companion with an excuse at the end of his tongue, but now she was tripping ahead with the airy grace of a nymph, and crying gaily: "Hurry up, Cliff! Do come and look! Here are some of the dearest little ducks. See, aren't they sweet?"

Her clear, silver laugh rang out with the musical ring he remembered so well, when the girl before him was a budding woman of seventeen, and he a slender youth of twenty, her devoted slave. The excuse died on his lips, and he joined in her laugh, as the mother duck, with angry, startled quacks, led her seminary of downy ducklings away to the pond, gleaming silver blue through the trees.

"Edith, you are as much a child as ever. I thought three years would surely make a young lady of you."

"Never! I shall never be anything but a child, I fear. But come, sit down by me here," and then, as he sat down on the rustic bench beside her, "doesn't it seem like old times to be together once more? Now I am prepared to hear all the news. Pray tell me, sir, what have you been doing for the past three years—since I bade you a tearful farewell?"

With genuine interest she followed the recital of his varied experiences—battles hardly won, obstacles overcome with difficulty, and ultimate success; while Lonsdale forgot time, place, circumstances, everything in the pleasure of answering her eager questions, and in asking news of old scenes and mutual friends. She told him the history of her life during his three years' absence, carefully omitting all that might lead him to suspect a change in her circumstances. As often as he attempted to lead up to the fact of his marriage, with her quick woman's intuition of what was coming, she interrupted him with another question. Never had she been so gay, so animated, and it was without effort, too, for she really delighted in living over the past in company with her handsome old playmate.

For some time their talk was merely such as might have passed between any two old friends, and they both enjoyed it thoroughly; but Edith did not intend to let her old sweetheart off without some punishment. Seeing his careful avoidance of tender topics, she interrupted him in a description of life in South Africa, and with a sudden change of tone, said:

"Yes, Cliff, you men have much the best of it in a case of

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this kind." What kind he was left to infer. "When you are compelled to leave the girl you like, though it may be a wrench at first, you have so much to do and to think about, your lives are so full, that you have but little time to grieve; while we poor women have to stay at home with no absorbing work to bury ourselves and our troubles in, with nothing to do but to count the minutes and wish they would fly faster. Now, while you have been out in a far-off land, like Ulysses, winning wealth and glory (and a coat of tan, too, Cliff, which is very becoming!) I, like poor, patient Penelope have been spinning——"

"Yarns, I'll wager!" he interrupted, laughingly, "for they're the only things I ever heard of your spinning."

She joined in his laugh, but added severely:

"Your levity is unseemly, sir, when it spoils such a fine comparison. But, seriously, I do wonder sometimes," she went on, getting pathetic, "how I have stood the last three years—without you, I mean. But I don't believe you have cared one bit, Cliff!" And she shot a challenge from her blue eyes into his grey ones.

"Edith!" He was about to add a hasty remonstrance, when the realisation of his position came to him, and he remained silent.

"You say 'Edith' just as you used to say it when I tormented you so, when we were—children. I never used to like my name until you told me you thought it pretty. Then, whenever you would say it, I used to think it was the very prettiest name in the world."

She said all this with a little droop of her head which struck a chill to Clifford Lonsdale's heart. The conversation was plainly becoming dangerous. What should he do? Edith evidently believed in the reality of his attachment for her, and meant to resume their relations at the point where they had been broken off when he went to South Africa, to seek the fortune which was to win the favour of her guardian. A year's absence had calmed his youthful ardour, and six months' companionship with the pretty daughter of his employer had given rise to another attachment which he realised was the grand passion of his manhood, and not the impulsive affection of youth. There had been no correspondence between himself and Edith, according to the mandate of her guardian. It would have been an easy matter to write her the news of his marriage, but to tell it to her with her eyes looking into his was a task before which he quailed. If she still loved him, how could he bear to see her radiant face overclouded by the story of his faithlessness?

He stole a look at her, and his heart failed him. She was sitting on a root of the tree now, her hands at her side lightly touching the tree, and one little arched foot idly drawing figures on the ground, while a smile curved her rosy, wilful mouth. She wore a dark blue skirt, and a pretty blue and white blouse; this, with a blue walking hat and natty leather belt, completed a rather masculine costume, which suited to perfection the trim, slender figure.

The sunlight glittered through the branches, and gleamed upon her bronze-coloured hair, which waved in a wealth of ripples about her small, well-shaped head.

Clifford felt the old witchery coming over him, when suddenly he seemed to see the picture of a dear form, tall and willowy; one who, womanly in everything, never affected the mannish mode of dressing, but preferred soft, clinging stuffs and dainty laces; one who was the light and happiness of his life. In place of the imperious, dark-blue eyes he seemed to see a pair of warm brown ones, whose every glance told of a tender, affectionate nature. Then he said with a good deal of emphasis:

"I think it is one of the sweetest names in the world."

"*One* of the sweetest? You used to say it was the very sweetest. Now, Cliff, I believe someone has wheedled you into saying *her* name is the sweetest. Villain, speak!" with mock tragedy.

He felt that his opportunity had come.

"Well, you see, after the senior partner came out to Johannesburg I used to go to his house a good deal, and he—you see, had a daughter, and——"

"I thought so! What was *her* name, please?"

"Dorothy."

"So! And you consider that name prettier than Edith? I don't admire your taste, sir! Do you remember the verses you scribbled in my autograph book?"

His golden opportunity for confession was lost, and he looked down at her in a disheartened sort of way, as he answered abstractedly:

"No, I've forgotten them."

Her eyes glanced up at him with a world of reproach in their blue depths.

"Have you really, Cliff? And they were so pretty."

He felt compunction seize him.

"Oh, yes, I do remember them now!" he interrupted. "Don't they go something like this?—

"She who comes to me and pleadeth,
In the lovely name of Edith,
Shall not fail of what is wanted.
Edith means 'the blessed'—therefore
All that she may wish or care for
Will, when best for her, be granted."

"There, I knew you couldn't have forgotten them. Aren't they pretty? I'm so glad my name means 'the blessed'; and really"—her face lighted up—"it seems to fit in my case, now, at any rate; for I have always wished to travel, and here I am in this beautiful place, with the one I care for most on earth!"

Her eyes glowed, and Lonsdale, not dreaming that she might refer to anyone but himself, was stricken with horror at having allowed her to make such a confession. He nerved himself with an effort, but Edith, pitying his confusion, and feeling that she had gone so far that explanations must inevitably follow unless she made a diversion, rose hurriedly, and said:

"Listen, Cliff! Don't you hear the dinner gong?"

Cliff did not, nor did she, but without waiting for his answer, she hurried towards the hotel. Lonsdale, reviling his evil genius, followed her. She had used this ruse as a means of escape, and felt rather conscience-stricken for the trick; but in a moment all qualms vanished, for in a carriage just entering the courtyard she perceived her husband. At the same moment Lonsdale, glancing towards the verandah, saw his wife seated at one end, alone. She looked in calm surprise at him and the girl at his side. Edith, noting the look, smiled to herself, and turning quickly to Lonsdale, said, with a meaning glance towards the verandah:

"You'd better hurry, Cliff; your wife is waiting for you!"

He started with amazement.

"You knew, then?"

"Yes. Wasn't I clever to mislead you so?" Then, after another glance at Mrs. Lonsdale: "Really, Cliff, I must admire your taste. She is as sweet as—honey. I'm awfully glad for your sake, Cliff; let me congratulate you."

With a world of relief on his face, Lonsdale warmly grasped the hand she held out, but flushed hotly at her next words.

"I'm very pleased and all that, you know, but I think you might have let me know before. How long since?"—with another interrogatory glance.

He stammered.

"Not very long—a few weeks—we're on our honeymoon now——"

"Why, how odd!" she exclaimed in mock surprise. "Two bridegrooms in the same hotel! Do you see that tall, handsome man just getting out of that carriage? Well, he's on his honeymoon, too."

"Very odd!" Clifford began, when a look at her roguish face stopped him, and he finished by saying: "Why, Edith, you little hypocrite! I really believe you are—you must be——"

A wave of crimson swept over her face, and she hastened towards the man who had just alighted from the carriage; but as Lonsdale stood staring after her, with perplexity written on every line of his face, she threw a charming look over her shoulder at him.

"You're right, I am," she said.

Nancy Leigh.

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ENTIRELY RECONCILED.

Being the Most Interesting Love Story of Esther Remington.

ESTHER REMINGTON stood before her long mirror, the picture of dejection. Evidently her thoughts were not of the charming reflection centred in its clear depths, and yet the slender, erect figure, in its close-fitting, satin gown, with filmy lace forming delicate shadows on the round arms and neck, was very pleasant to contemplate. But the proud face, with its daintily pencilled eyebrows and clear, grey eyes fringed with heavy lashes, had an air of weariness and sadness. Yet it was only three months since Esther Vane had stood in all the splendour of this very attire, and pronounced the words which made her Arthur Remington's wife.

The door was opened with noisy haste, and a young man entered.

"I forgot everything about this confounded party, Esther," he began in hurried explanation. "I see you are dressed, but you know it never takes me long to get ready." And Mr. Remington commenced the preparations for his toilet.

"We shall be rather late, I think," his wife responded, without turning towards him; but there was a tremulous resentment in the manner with which she clasped the wide band of gold upon her arm.

"It's a terrible bore, I know, this party-going," said her husband. "I always thought you women liked arriving at 'sensation time,'" he added carelessly; "but then—I can see that you have the bad taste to be 'huffy' again this evening," as Esther maintained silence.

She confronted him with flashing eyes.

"I certainly should not go at this late hour," she said in proud disdain, "except that it might appear a trifle odd to be absent from an entertainment given especially in honour of our marriage."

"At least you can decline all such invitations in the future," her husband coolly retorted. "You know I do not care for parties and balls—indeed, they are almost new in my experience."

"You would rather stay at home with a nasty old book, I suppose."

"I certainly should. Our own fireside is good enough for me."

"But I like society. I have been accustomed to it all my life."

"That is unfortunate, for mother and I entertain very little. It's no use, Esther—you can't make a society man of me. If you want to go to social functions you must provide yourself with another escort." And with a laugh Remington deliberately proceeded to arrange his tie.

Poor Esther! She walked proudly into the next room and threw herself upon the pretty blue lounge, regardless alike of lace, flowers, and daintily-dressed hair. But there were no tears—only miserable thoughts that filled her heart almost to bursting, and took away the power to draw long breaths. She had looked forward almost with a child's pleasure to this evening, and now it was spoilt by the words just spoken.

But it would not do to think just now. Her husband was ready, and the ordeal must be got over somehow; and she must personate the happy bride. A wretched evening it proved to her, for Arthur made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was bored, and to please him she proposed an early departure. All the happiness of her life was over already, she thought, as they rolled silently homeward in the carriage. And she had given up the old free home life, and come miles and miles away from the dear home faces, to meet only coldness and neglect.

Oh, how she detested this new home, where the watch-word of life seemed work, with never any amusement except some dismal lecture or literary reunion equally tedious! And her husband—how changed he was since those happy days at Rusper, when they first met and loved each other. Already he was accustomed to receive her affection and ministrations as ordinary events, while in her own home it was always she who had received homage and attention.

All this Esther Remington went over in her mind, with a sense of distress working at her heart as she thought of the future that was to be so different from the life she had planned.

Where was the lover-husband with the constant, devoted attentions that had begun with their courtship?

But she knew the cause of it all. It was that stern woman whom she now called mother. It was so different from the "happy-go-lucky" life of her maiden home. Here it was breakfast at seven, dinner at one, tea at six, and to get three meals well over seemed the chief business of the day.

When her husband's mother prepared to wash the china and polish the silver, Esther offered rather timidly to assist in these duties; Mrs. Remington accepted her services, but did not veil her contempt of the inefficiency with which the task was performed. It was all very different from what Esther had pictured; but she was determined never to complain, for had not her husband told her he was comparatively poor? And had she not declared, with the enthusiasm of a girl who loved the man she was about to marry, that she would be his willing helpmate and that his mother should be her mother?

To do Remington justice it was impossible for him to understand the depressing effect of this new home atmosphere upon his young wife. All his life he had been accustomed to see his mother move in the same routine with the same regularity; and truly she had been a good mother to him, for she herself had prepared him for college and sacrificed many things to his advancement.

It was a shock to her when Arthur, taking his summer holiday at Rusper, had written a glowing description of the beautiful girl who had consented to become his wife; and when Esther at length arrived after their brief courtship—for Arthur had been a very ardent wooer—the mother's heart was hardened against this piece of mere girlish prettiness as with some justice she considered her.

The evenings that Esther had expected to be full of brightness proved to be very dull affairs, with the elder Mrs. Remington ceaselessly knitting, and by her very presence putting a constraint upon her most trifling words.

Esther mistook the elder woman's undemonstrative manner for coldness, and failing to understand the really kind nature beneath a stern exterior, was awkward and constrained in her presence. So it ended in Arthur's first yawning a good deal, and then settling down to a book, and to Esther, who loved life and laughter, it seemed very dismal to pass evening after evening with no sound but the turning over of leaves and the clicking needles.

On her side Mrs. Remington secretly condemned her daughter-in-law's "incorrigible idleness." Both were good women, but it was impossible that they could understand each other. And Arthur, carelessly content with his own life, selfishly forgot that it was all new and strange to poor little Esther, who gradually lost her innocent gaiety, and became pale and silent, the mere shadow of her former self.

* * * * *

Esther was ill—so ill that they spoke only in whispers near

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her, and outside straw was strewn on the road to deaden all sound. Her father had just arrived, summoned by telegram.

"And you tell me that Esther fell in going down the cellar steps?" he asked in a tone of astonishment. "And pray, madam, what necessity could there be for my daughter to do such a thing?"

"It was her own offer," said Mrs. Remington, quite as haughtily. "Esther was assisting me in my household duties. Why should she not? Her husband, as you ought to know, is a poor man."

Mr. Marston turned away without ceremony, and went quietly into his daughter's room. What a change to him was this pale-faced woman with the purple shadows under the dull eyes, and the pinched lips all purple, too! Where was the man who was responsible for it all, he asked himself in bitter anger, as he glanced round; and then he saw his son-in-law kneeling at the other side of the bed, with his wife's passive hand in both his own.

"Do you think she will die?" he whispered when Mr. Marston had beckoned him out of the room, and surely anyone could read the haggard misery in his face. But the father answered with a cruel directness:

"I think that if she dies you have killed her by your neglect and coldness."

Arthur Remington had come to believe this himself. The very morning of the accident he had found a bundle of Esther's dainty love-letters, full of allusions to the future sweetness of their lives together; the difference between the dream and the reality had suddenly dawned upon him. There came before him a vision of Esther as he had first seen her in her dress of pale blue, with laughing eyes, looking out from under her wide-brimmed hat. How pale and quiet she had grown! He had been cross to her that morning because of some trifle. Accustomed to self-reliant women, her childishness sometimes jarred upon him. He forgot that he had chosen her from all others, and it was his duty to make all things easy for her. Pierced with sudden remorse he started up, resolved to seek her at once; but as he reached the door a dreadful shriek rang out and then his mother's terrified call for help.

Mrs. Remington, busy at her cooking-table, had required some jelly to be taken to the cellar. The one servant not being forthcoming, Esther had volunteered to carry it. It was a simple task, and Mrs. Remington willingly confided it to her; but poor Esther was awkward and inexperienced; her high-heeled shoes caught on the cellar stairs; her head swam round, she faltered, then fell heavily down the whole steep flight.

Arthur scarcely knew how he reached her or carried her up those dreadful steps again. The hastily-summoned physician looked very grave indeed over his new patient. And then in the terrible delirium that followed Remington began to realise all that his young wife had suffered in their brief wedded life. Her constant complaints of his coldness brought the tears to his eyes. It is a torturing experience to waken to a sense of our own deficiencies too late for expiation, and this was his condition. It came upon him like a revelation that he had been a careless and inconsiderate husband; but his easy-going nature had received a shock that developed all his higher qualities. Hereafter he was resolved to lead a life full of consideration for all humanity.

When Esther came slowly back to health and strength again, her father insisted, with rather an imperious manner, that his daughter should accompany him home.

"And you may depend upon it," he added, "that I shall detain her as long as possible from a place where she is expected to do general housework."

Mrs. Remington naturally enough resented this remark.

"You are mistaken, sir," she said in her stiff way. "I do most of the work here. I seldom called on Esther to assist me."

Mr. Marston pointed towards his daughter's room.

"How came I to find her there, then?" he sternly asked. "Had she not been performing a menial's work——"

"It was very unfortunate that Esther could not do me a slight service without endangering her life," was the cold answer. "But as for menial work—pray remember that my son's wife occupies no higher a position than my son's mother."

"Esther is not accustomed to anything of the kind. She was brought up in luxury," answered Mr. Marston.

"In that case you should not have been so ready to give her to a poor man," said Mrs. Remington, unflinchingly. "I have done my best to make your daughter's home comfortable, I could do no more. Unhappily, she has few resources within herself, and attaches too much importance to trifles."

"Hush, mother!" interposed Arthur, who had listened with ill-concealed impatience to all this. "What fault exists lies at my door. I made too little allowance for my poor girl's pleasure-loving nature, and denied her the social excitement to which she had been accustomed. In future——"

"We will say nothing about that just now." Mr. Marston spoke decidedly. "My daughter will remain with me until her health is re-established; then we can decide what is best for you both."

To this decision Arthur Remington submitted in proud silence when he found that it was Esther's wish to go back to her old home. At parting he clasped her in his arms and implored her passionately to forgive his past thoughtlessness. She answered languidly, with the apathy of a statue:

"Indeed, Arthur, I have nothing to forgive. I only regret that we have understood each other so little. Two such different people should never have come together."

"You will write to me often, and send for me when you desire to come home?" he asked her at the last moment.

She assented indifferently, and in another instant he was alone upon the station platform.

The weeks went slowly by and lengthened into months without bringing home again Arthur Remington's wife. Her letters were few, cold, and constrained. Her father needed her, she wrote; she was quite well and contented, and would write again soon. This was about the substance of each letter, and involuntarily Arthur adopted the same colouring of constraint. He had resolved to let his wife choose her own time to return to him, but he forgot that it was impossible for her to read between the lines of his letters, or to gather from their contents his longing for her presence. In the meantime his home seemed very empty, and his heart desolate.

Fortune smiled upon him in the year he and his wife were estranged. A bachelor uncle left him all his money. He resigned his position in the bank, established his mother in a home of her own, and resolved to go abroad. When he expressed his intention of settling a part of his fortune on Esther, Mr. Marston haughtily declined the proposition in his daughter's name, so he intimated, and Arthur, now seriously hurt and angry, made up his mind to a life-long estrangement from his wife. If she could live without him, he could live without her, he proudly thought.

But first he would gratify a long-repressed yearning to revisit the place where he had first met his lost love. It was in the sweet, early autumn, which brought back so vividly the old happy days, that Arthur reached Rusper. As he strolled idly along over the now solitary walk, the sweet, laughing face of Esther came before his memory with a thrill of positive pain. Surely he had been sufficiently punished for his thoughtlessness. Could nothing regain him his sweet wife?

As he thus pondered he turned a sudden curve in the path, and there stood before him a slender figure clad in pale blue, with a wide-brimmed hat; but the grey eyes were not laughing now; they had filled suddenly with tears, and husband and wife stood gazing silently into each other's faces. But only for an instant; the next Esther was in Arthur's arms, held there with a passionate intensity that it seemed would never relax, while kisses rained upon the sweet, tear-stained face.

"Never shall we part again!" he murmured brokenly. "Esther, promise me that neither pride nor estrangement nor anything but death shall separate us again in this life."

Esther's face lit up with a smile as she whispered softly: "I promise."

They sealed the vow with a kiss of entire reconciliation; and after all Arthur Remington went abroad, but not alone—his wife accompanied him.

Grace Maynard.

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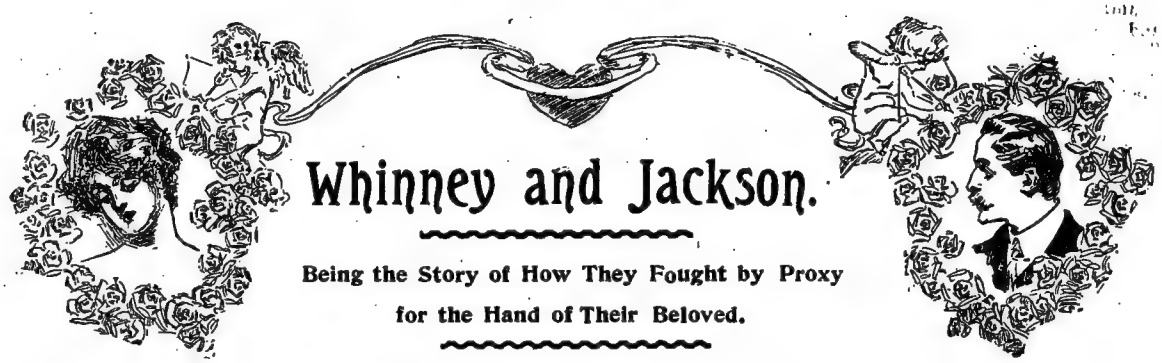

Whinney and Jackson.

Being the Story of How They Fought by Proxy for the Hand of Their Beloved.

WHINNEY loved Miss Robins. So did Jackson. Whinney was determined, and so was Jackson. Whinney won a prize at golf and was convinced that his victory over Miss Robins was complete, but the next day Jackson won a prize. Also as to which was her favourite no one could determine. Upon both she smiled; to both she held out her hand with equal frankness. Jenkins, a common friend and a shrewd observer, said that a lucky word, a look, a gesture on the part of either one might settle it at any moment. He understood women.

One afternoon, on the golf links at the Scottish village in which they were staying, Whinney and Jackson refused to speak to each other.

"I would rather be her caddy than a millionaire," said Whinney, so that she might overhear him.

"Than a king," spoke up Jackson, looking far away.

How handsome she was in her short skirt, and as graceful as the new-fledged bird that hops upon the first grass of spring. Surely she was enough to turn the head of any man, to make him stake his all upon the chance of winning her love. Jackson had avowed his devotion and she had listened patiently and smiled sweetly as she declared that as yet she did not know her own mind, and as her heart was companion to her mind, she could not answer. She had listened and smiled, and said the same thing to Whinney.

The sun was down and the players and the spectators were leaving the links. Miss Robins' ball was lost, and out in the dusk the two rivals were hunting for it.

"Now, don't substitute another ball and swear that you have found it," said Jackson.

"Ah, I see you credit me with a deception that is at this moment passing through your own mind," Whinney declared.

"If she were not here I would call you a scoundrel."

"Oh, out with it! Don't let her stand in your way."

"If I weren't afraid that her tender nature would prompt her to take pity on you I would scalp you with a golf stick."

"Ah, when you show her a drop of my blood I will exhibit to her a pint of yours."

"Come, gentlemen, don't quarrel," Jenkins exclaimed, in a voice more than loud enough.

"Jenkins," cried Whinney, "attend to your own affairs. One would think that you were a peace commission appointed by all the powers on earth."

"And when you want to shout," Jackson spoke up, "reserve your strength for an occasion when I am not present."

"Ah," said Jenkins, "so you have both resolved upon insulting me, your friend. You have mistaken my gentleness for timidity. But I want to tell you that I'm as revengeful——"

"As a lamb," suggested Jackson.

"Or a rampageous worm," put in Whinney.

"All right, you'll pay for this." And then walking back to Miss Robins he offered her his arm and took her away.

The next morning the two rivals received a copy of the following note:

"GENTLEMEN,—*You have misunderstood my nature if you suppose that I am only a dove. In my veins flows the blood of the old vikings who loved danger and blood. I have often declared that the man to whom I give my hand must fight for me. Hitherto there has been no occasion, but now there is a pressing opportunity. You must fight each other. The battle-ground shall be the little grassy spot to the left of the golf links, where the two oaks bend over and intertwine their horny figures. There you shall meet to-morrow night, at ten o'clock, and with no words, for they might lead to a reconciliation, fight with golf sticks till one of you is vanquished. Then let the victor repair to the little church near by, which will be lighted up, where I shall gladly receive him.*"

When Whinney read down and grasped the name of the writer, a thrill shot through him. Indeed he was shot with a thrill several times before he reached the end. "Golf sticks," he muttered. "Why, I'd rather a man would come at me with a scythe. And in his arm that scoundrel Jackson's got the strength of a mule. I don't want to fight—but I adore her and something must be done. But why should not wit fight my battle for me? Why can't I hire some tramp and let him go there in the dark and hammer that scoundrel's head into a jelly? I will."

The night came and it was almost pitch dark. On a knoll not far from the two oaks stood Whinney and his tramp.

"Now you understand it thoroughly, I believe," said Whinney.

"I think I've got it all right, sir."

"I don't want you to kill him, you understand—but I *do* want you to make him sore."

"Very well, sir."

"Well, go along, and when the thing's over, come up here and I'll give you a five pound note."

The tramp disappeared, and soon there arose the sharp noise of the fray. It was to be a stubborn combat. Whinney heard a footfall on the grass and turned round. "Who are you?" he inquired.

"What, that you, Whinney?"

"Jackson, as I am alive! Yes, it is I."

Jackson laughed. "I thought you were down in the hollow fighting my man."

"And I thought you were fighting mine."

"Well, we've tricked each other. I'm too civilised to fight."

"So am I. Listen, they'll crack each other's skulls."

"Let 'em crack. Here comes someone with a lantern—and see, the little church is lighted. Now, how are we going to settle it?"

"Let our men decide by their valour."

The combat had ceased, and they heard the fighters approaching, and they arrived just as the man halted with the lantern. They were paid, and asked as to who was the victor.

"It was a good joke," spoke up the man with the lantern. "I came over to see them fight. My friend Jenkins got the thing up—and see that church lighted over there? He is marrying Miss Robins."

The two tramps grinned in the yellow light.

"I admit we hain't done bad," said one of them. "We are pals, you know, and so we sat down and hammered each other's sticks."

Whinney and Jackson reached over and shook hands.

Oliver Read.

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His Parting Shot.

HE: "But couldn't you learn to love me, Ida?" She: "I don't think I could, George." He (reaching for his hat): "It is as I feared. You are too old to learn."

Quick Work.

GUSSY: "Well, old fellow, I asked Miss Amy last night to marry me, and she declined." Goslin: "Did she deliberate, as though hesitating to pain you?" Gussy: "No; she produced her negative by the instantaneous process."

She Wouldn't Like it.

JACK (to his *fiancée*): "I think of getting a musical instrument, Maud. For instance, a cornet." Maud (in dismay): "Oh, no; not that horrid thing." Jack (in surprise): "And why not, dearest?" Maud (blushing violently): "It makes the lips so hard."

A Matter of Emphasis.

GRACIE: "So John proposed last night, and you accepted him! Do tell me how it all happened?" Rosie: "Oh, it was simply a matter of emphasis." Gracie: "Of emphasis?" Rosie: "Yes, he said, 'Don't you love me a little *bit?*' And I answered, 'No, I do not love you a *little* bit.'"

No Time to Spare.

GENTLEMAN FROM CHICAGO: "I want to be personally conducted over London, only please be quick, as I only have sixty minutes to spare." Tourist's Guide: "You wish to see the whole of the Metropolis in the space of one hour?" Well, sir, it seems to me that what you require is a lightning conductor."

How Good of Him!

THEY had just entered the conservatory from the ballroom. "Oh, dear!" said the sweet girl, fanning her cheek. "I'm melting." The young man saw an opportunity. "I knew it was rather warm," he said, "but I didn't think it was as hot as that." "What do you mean?" "Why, hot enough to melt pure gold."

And the Robin Robbing.

MR. CHATTERTON: "I've decided to go into business, Miss Weatherbee." Miss Weatherbee: "I'm very glad to hear it, Mr. Chatterton." "Yes, I've made up my mind to become a farmer. Think how jolly it must be to go out of a morning and see the butterflies making butter, and the grasshoppers making grass—and—all that sort of thing, you know."

Her Look of Admiration.

BIG BROTHER: "I should like to know what you've been flirting with that Saphead for?" Pretty Sister (indignantly): "I haven't." "Yes, you have. He told a friend you stood before him for ten minutes as if entranced, and you looked straight into his eyes if you would read his very soul, and he said if ever ardent admiration shone in a human face, it did in yours." "The conceited fellow! I was looking at my own reflection in his eye-glasses."

Safe.

"So you are going to marry? Have you anything laid by?" "Yes, I've got a rich uncle laid by with a paralytic stroke, and I'm his only surviving relative."

A Lucky Find.

"ALBERT, dear, while looking through some of your old clothes I made such a lucky find that I ordered a new dress on the strength of it." "What was it, dear?" "Half a dozen cheques that had never been written on."

More Household Economy.

YOUNG WIFE: "I wish you would take a day off and help me bring up all those jars of fruit I preserved last year, and find some way to get rid of the stuff. It's all spoilt, as usual." Husband: "What's the hurry?" Young Wife: "I want the jars to preserve more fruit."

Wise Advice.

FOND MOTHER: "If that young man should take advantage of you, and try to kiss you, what would you do?" Dutiful Daughter: "I should remind him that I have a mother whom I love very dearly." Fond Mother (after reflection): "I think, dear, you had better remind him that you have a father."

Insinuating!

"MISS ETHEL is a long time coming down," said the youth to the servant, after waiting some time for the young lady's appearance. "Perhaps," he added, with a laugh, "perhaps she is making up her mind whether to see me or not." "No," said the servant, with an icy smile, "it isn't her mind she is making up."

Took Him as a Bargain.

HE (humbly, after being accepted): "I know I am not worthy of you. Tell me, my beautiful darling, what you saw in such a plain sort of fellow to—— Do you know, I was dreadfully afraid you were going to refuse me." She: "I did intend to, but you know my weakness. I could never resist a bargain, and when you proposed you did look so awfully cheap! How could I let you go?"

Difficult to Please.

BROWN: "Why don't you marry and settle down?" Jones: "Well, I've got my reasons for it. The woman I want to marry must have lots of money and be smart, but when I find a woman who has money, and who is willing to marry me, her willingness to marry me is positive proof to my mind that she is stupid, and then, of course, she doesn't suit me. I want a smart woman for a wife."

Dizzy Heights.

MR. POPINJAY (falling on his knees): "Miss Perkins, I can no longer resist the passionate impulse to appeal to you on the momentous subject that is fraught for me with the issues of life and death. And yet I am overawed at my presumption when I take into consideration the celestial glamour of your personal charms, the dazzling lustre of your intellectual attainments, the exquisite, the adorable——" Miss Perkins: "Excuse me, Mr. Popinjay, but there are times when eloquence is rather out of place. If you wish to pop the question, pop it, and be done with it." This was duly done.

The Curative.

SHE looked at him piteously, a sorrowful expression stealing over her face. "Your love is growing cold," she said. The words seemed forced as though within her breast lurked a desire not to tell him. The tears seemed nigh to her eyes. He placed his arm round her waist tenderly. One might think by this act that her words were untrue. He gave her a look of pity, but his eyes spoke his uneasiness. Clearly he was at a loss what to do. But suddenly his eyes lighted up as if by magic. "If you wouldn't mind," he told her, "you might wear my overcoat. I can stand the chilly night air." The moon smiled as, looking at the girl wrapped warmly in the man's coat, he saw that she would not be cold again.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

In the Wine Cellars of the Grand Babylon.

"I DIDN'T trust to mere good fortune. I didn't trust to anything except Rocco, and he deceived me."

"But why did you quarrel with him?"

"I didn't quarrel with him. I found him embalming a dead body in the State bedroom one night——"

"You what?" Babylon almost screamed.

"I found him embalming a dead body in the State bedroom," repeated Racksole in his quietest tones.

The two men gazed at each other, and then Racksole replenished Babylon's glass.

"Tell me," said Babylon, settling himself deep in an easy chair and lighting a cigar.

And Racksole thereupon recounted to him the whole of the Posen episode, with every circumstantial detail so far as he knew it. It was a long and complicated recital, and occupied about an hour. During that time little Félix never spoke a word, scarcely moved a muscle; only his small eyes gazed through the bluish haze of smoke. The clock on the mantelpiece tinkled midnight.

"Time for whisky and soda," said Racksole, and got up as if to ring the bell; but Babylon waved him back.

"You told me that this Sampson Levi had an audience of Prince Eugen to-day, but you have not told me the result of that audience," said Babylon.

"Because I do not yet know it. But I shall doubtless know to-morrow. In the meantime, I feel fairly sure that Levi declined to produce Prince Eugen's required million. I have reason to believe that the money was lent elsewhere."

"H'm!" mused Babylon; and then, carelessly, "I am not at all surprised at that arrangement for spying through the bathroom of the State apartments."

"Why are you not surprised?"

"Oh!" said Babylon, "it is such an obvious dodge—so easy to carry out. As for me, I took special care never to involve myself in these affairs. I knew they existed; I somehow felt that they existed. But I also felt that they lay outside my sphere. My business was to provide board and lodging of the most sumptuous kind for those who didn't mind paying for it; and I did my business. If anything else went on in the hotel, under the rose, I long ago determined to ignore it unless it should happen to be brought before my notice; and it never was brought before my notice. However, I admit that there is a certain pleasurable excitement in this kind of affair, and doubtless you have experienced that."

"I have," said Racksole simply, "though I believe you are laughing at me."

"By no means," Babylon replied. "Now what, if I may ask the question, is going to be your next step?"

"That is just what I desire to know myself," said Theodore Racksole.

"Well," said Babylon, after a pause, "let us begin. In the first place, it is possible you may be interested to hear that I happened to see Jules to-day."

"You did!," Racksole remarked with much calmness. "Where?"

"Well, it was early this morning, in Paris, just before I left there. The meeting was quite accidental, and Jules seemed rather surprised at meeting me. He respectfully inquired where I was going, and I said that I was going to Switzerland. At that moment I thought I was going to Switzerland. It had occurred to me that after all I should be happier there, and that I had better turn back and not see London any more. However, I changed my mind once again, and decided to come on to London, and accept the risks of being miserable there without my hotel. Then I asked Jules whither he was bound, and he told me that he was off to Constantinople, being interested in a new French hotel there. I wished him good luck, and we parted."

"Constantinople, eh!" said Racksole. "A highly suitable place for him, I should say."

"But," Babylon resumed, "I caught sight of him again."

"Where?"

"At Charing Cross, a few minutes before I had the pleasure of meeting you. Mr. Jules had not gone to Constantinople after all. He did not see me, or I should have suggested to him that in going from Paris to Constantinople it is not usual to travel *vid* London."

"The cheek of the fellow!" exclaimed Theodore Racksole. "The gorgeous and colossal cheek of the fellow!"

"Do you know anything of the antecedents of this Jules?" he continued, helping himself to whisky.

"Nothing whatever," said Babylon. "Until you told me, I don't think I was aware that his true name was Thomas

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"Come out, you villain!" Theodore Racksole cried, in low, almost vicious tones.

Jackson, though of course I knew that it was not Jules. I certainly was not aware that Miss Spencer was his wife, but I had long suspected that their relations were somewhat more intimate than the nature of their respective duties in the hotel absolutely demanded. All that I do know of Jules—he will always be called Jules—is that he gradually, by some mysterious personal force, acquired a prominent position in the hotel. Decidedly he was the cleverest and most intellectual waiter I have ever known, and he was specially skilled in the difficult task of retaining his own dignity while not interfering with that of other people. I'm afraid this information is a little too vague to be of any practical assistance in the present difficulty."

"What is the present difficulty?" Racksole queried, with a simple air.

"I should imagine that the present difficulty is to account for the man's presence in London."

"That is easily accounted for," said Racksole.

"How? Do you suppose he is anxious to give himself up to justice, or that the chains of habit bind him to the hotel?"

"Neither," said Racksole. "Jules is going to have another try—that's all."

"Another try at what?"

"At Prince Eugen. Either at his life or his liberty. Most probably the former this time; almost certainly the former. He has guessed that we are somewhat handicapped by our anxiety to keep Prince Eugen's predicament quite quiet, and he is taking advantage of that fact. As he is already fairly rich, on his own admission, the reward which has been offered to him must be enormous, and he is absolutely determined to get it. He has several times recently proved himself to be a daring fellow; unless I am mistaken he will shortly prove himself to be still more daring."

"But what can he do? Surely you don't suggest that he will attempt the life of Prince Eugen in this hotel?"

"Why not? If Reginald Dimmock fell on mere suspicion that he would turn out unfaithful to the conspiracy, why not Prince Eugen?"

"But it would be an unspeakable crime, and do infinite harm to the hotel!"

"True!" Racksole admitted, smiling. Little Félix Babylon seemed to brace himself for the grasping of this monstrous idea.

"How could it possibly be done?" he asked at length.

"Dimmock was poisoned."

"Yes, but you had Rocco here then, and Rocco was in the plot. It is conceivable that Rocco could have managed it—barely conceivable. But without Rocco I cannot think it possible. I cannot even think that Jules would attempt it. You see, in a place like the Grand Babylon, as probably I needn't point out to you, food has to pass through so many hands that to poison one person without killing perhaps fifty would be a most delicate operation. Moreover, Prince Eugen, unless he has changed his habits, is always served by his own attendant, old Hans, and therefore any attempt to tamper with a cooked dish immediately before serving would be hazardous in the extreme."

"Granted," said Racksole. "The wine, however, might be more easily got at. Had you thought of that?"

"I had not," Babylon admitted. "You are an ingenious theorist, but I happen to know that Prince Eugen always has his wine opened in his own presence. No doubt it would be opened by Hans. Therefore the wine theory is not tenable, my friend."

"I do not see why," said Racksole. "I know nothing of wine as an expert, and I very seldom drink it, but it seems to me that a bottle of wine might be tampered with while it was still in the cellar, especially if there was an accomplice in the hotel."

"You think, then, that you are not yet rid of all your conspirators?"

"I think that Jules might still have an accomplice within the building."

"And that a bottle of wine could be opened and recorked without leaving any trace of the operation?" Babylon was a trifle sarcastic.

"I don't see the necessity of opening the bottle in order to poison the wine," said Racksole. "I have never tried to poison anybody by means of a bottle of wine, and I don't lay claim to any natural talent as a poisoner, but I think I could devise several ways of managing the trick. Of course, I admit that I may be entirely mistaken as to Jules' intentions."

"Ah!" said Félix Babylon. "The wine cellars beneath us are one of the wonders of London. I hope you are aware, Mr. Racksole, that when you bought the Grand Babylon you bought what is probably the finest stock of wines in England, if not in Europe. In the valuation I reckoned them at sixty thousand pounds. And I may say that I always took care that the cellars were properly guarded. Even Jules would experience a serious difficulty in breaking into the cellars without the connivance of the wine-clerk, and the wine-clerk is, or was, incorruptible."

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"I am ashamed to say that I have not yet inspected my wines," smiled Racksole; "I have never given them a thought. Once or twice I have taken the trouble to make a tour of the hotel, but I omitted the cellars in my excursions."

"Impossible, my dear fellow!" said Babylon, amused at such a confession, to him—a great connoisseur and lover of fine wines—almost incredible. "But really you must see them to-morrow. If I may, I will accompany you."

"Why not to-night?" Racksole suggested calmly.

"To-night! It is very late: Hubbard will have gone to bed."

"And may I ask who is Hubbard? I remember the name but dimly."

"Hubbard is the wine-clerk of the Grand Babylon," said Félix, with a certain emphasis. "A sedate man of forty. He has the keys of the cellars. He knows every bottle of every bin, its date, its qualities, its value. And he is a teetotaler. Hubbard is a curiosity. No wine can leave the cellars without his knowledge, and no person can enter the cellars without his knowledge. At least, that is how it was in my time," Babylon added.

"We will wake him," said Racksole.

"But it is one o'clock in the morning," Babylon protested.

"Never mind—that is, if you consent to accompany me. The cellar is the same by night as by day. Therefore, why not now?"

Babylon shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish," he agreed, with his indestructible politeness.

"And now to find this Mr. Hubbard, with his key of the cupboard," said Racksole, as they walked out of the room together. Although the hour was so late, the hotel was not, of course, closed for the night. A few guests still remained about in the public rooms, and a few fatigued waiters were still in attendance. One of these latter was dispatched in search of the singular Mr. Hubbard, and it fortunately turned out that this gentleman had not actually retired, though he was on the point of doing so. He brought the keys to Mr. Racksole in person, and after he had had a little chat with his former master, the proprietor and the ex-proprietor of the Grand Babylon Hotel proceeded on their way to the cellars.

These cellars extend over, or rather, under, quite half the superficial area of the whole hotel—the longitudinal half which lies next to the Strand. Owing to the fact that the ground slopes sharply from the Strand to the river, the Grand Babylon is, so to speak, deeper near the Strand than it is near the Thames. Towards the Thames there are, below the entrance level, a basement and a sub-basement. Towards the Strand there are basement, sub-basement, and the huge wine cellars beneath all. After descending the four flights of the service stairs, and traversing a long passage, running parallel with the kitchen, the two found themselves opposite a door, which, on being unlocked, gave access to another flight of stairs. At the foot of this was the main entrance to the cellars. Outside the entrance was the wine-lift, for the ascension of delicious fluids to the upper floor and, opposite, Mr. Hubbard's little office. There was electri light everywhere. Babylon, who, as being most accustomed to them, held the bunch of keys, opened the great door, and then they were in the first cellar—the first of a suite of five. Racksole was struck not only by the icy coolness of the place, but also by its vastness. Babylon had seized a portable electric hand-light, attached to a long wire, which lay handy, and, waving it about, disclosed the dimensions of the place. By that flashing illumination the subterranean chamber looked unutterably weird and mysterious, with its rows of numbered bins, stretching away into the distance till the radiance was reduced to the occasional far gleam of the light on the shoulder of a bottle. Then Babylon switched on the fixed electric lights, and Theodore Racksole entered upon a personally-conducted tour of what was quite the most interesting part of his own property.

Racksole followed Jules in hot pursuit, but the latter jumped clean over the Embankment wall into the river.

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To see the innocent enthusiasm of Félix Babylon for these stores of exhilarating liquid was what is called in the North "a sight for sair een." He displayed to Racksole's bewildered gaze, in their due order, all the wines of three Continents—nay, of four, for the superb and luscious Constantia wine of Cape Colony was not wanting in that most catholic collection of vintages. Beginning with the unsurpassed products of Burgundy, he continued with the clarets of Médoc, Bordeaux, and Sauterne; then to the champagnes of Ay, Hautvilliers, and Pierry; then to the hocks and moselles of Germany, and the brilliant imitation champagnes of Main, Necker, and Naumberg; then to the famous and adorable Tokay of Hungary, and all the Austrian varieties of French wines, including Carlowitz and Somlauer; then to the dry sherries of Spain, including purest Manzanilla, and Amontillado, and Vino de Pasto; then to the wines of Malaga, both sweet and dry, and all the "Spanish reds" from Catalonia, including the dark "Tent" so often used sacramentally; then to the renowned port of Oporto. Then he proceeded to the Italian cellar, and descanted upon the excellence of Barolo from Piedmont, of Chianti from Tuscany, of Orvieto from the Roman States, of the "Tears of Christ" from Naples, and the commoner Marsala from Sicily. And so on, to an extent and with a fulness of detail which cannot be rendered here.

At the end of the suite of cellars there was a glazed door, which, as could be seen, gave access to a supplemental and smaller cellar, an apartment about fifteen or sixteen feet square.

"Anything special in there?" asked Racksole curiously, as they stood before the door, and looked within at the serried ends of bottles.

"Ah!" exclaimed Babylon, almost smacking his lips, "therein lies the cream of all."

"The best champagne, I suppose?" said Racksole.

"Yes," said Babylon, "the best champagne is there—a very special Sillery, as exquisite as you will find anywhere. But I see, my friend, that you fall into the common error of putting champagne first among wines. That distinction belongs to Burgundy. You have old Burgundy in that cellar, Mr. Racksole, which cost me—how much do you think?—eighty pounds a bottle. Probably it will never be drunk," he added, with a sigh. "It is too expensive even for princes and plutocrats."

"Yes, it will," said Racksole quickly. "You and I will have a bottle up to-morrow."

"Then," continued Babylon, still riding his hobby-horse, "there is a sample of the Rhine wine dated 1706 which caused such a sensation at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873. There is also a singularly glorious Persian wine from Shiraz, the like of which I have never seen elsewhere. Also there is an unrivalled vintage of Romanée-Conti, greatest of all modern Burgundies. If I remember right, Prince Eugen invariably has a bottle when he comes to stay here. It is not on the hotel wine list, of course, and only a few customers know of it. We do not precisely hawk it about the dining-room."

"Indeed!" said Racksole. "Let us go inside."

They entered the stone apartment, rendered almost sacred by the preciousness of its contents, and Racksole looked round with a strangely intent and curious air. At the far side was a grating, through which came a feeble light.

"What is that?" asked the millionaire sharply.

"That is merely a ventilation grating. Good ventilation is absolutely essential."

"Looks broken, doesn't it?" Racksole suggested, and then, putting a finger quickly on Babylon's shoulder, "there's someone in the cellar. Can't you hear breathing, down there, behind that bin?"

The two men stood tense and silent for a while, listening under the ray of the single electric light in the ceiling. Half the cellar was involved in gloom. At length Racksole walked firmly down the central passage-way between the bins and turned to the corner at the right.

"Come out, you villain!" he said, in a low, well-nigh vicious tone, and dragged up a cowering figure.

He had expected to find a man, but it was his own daughter, Nella Racksole, upon whom he had laid angry hands.

TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

Further Events in the Cellar.

"Well, father," Nella greeted her astounded parent. "You should make sure that you have got hold of the right person before you use all that terrible muscular force of yours. I do believe you have broken my shoulder-bone." She rubbed her shoulder with a comical expression of pain, and then stood up before the two men. The skirt of her dark grey dress was torn and dirty, and the usually trim Nella looked as though she had been shot down a canvas fire-escape. Mechanically she smoothed her frock, and gave a straightening touch to her hair.

"Good evening, Miss Racksole," said Félix Babylon, bowing formally. "This is an unexpected pleasure." Félix's drawing-room manners never deserted him upon any occasion whatever.

"May I inquire what you are doing in my wine cellar, Nella Racksole?" said the millionaire, a little stiffly. He was certainly somewhat annoyed at having mistaken his daughter for a criminal; moreover, he hated to be surprised, and upon this occasion he had been surprised beyond any ordinary surprise; lastly, he was not at all pleased that Nella should be observed in that strange predicament by a stranger.

"I will tell you," said Nella. "I had been reading rather late in my room—the night was so close. I heard Big Ben strike half-past twelve, and then I put the book down, and went out on to the balcony of my window for a little fresh air before going to bed. I leant over the balcony very quietly—you will remember that I am on the third floor now—and looked down below into the little sunk yard which separates the wall of the hotel from Salisbury Lane. I was rather astonished to see a figure creeping across the yard. I knew there was no entrance into the hotel from that yard, and, besides, it is fifteen or twenty feet below the level of the street. So I watched. The figure went close up against the wall, and disappeared from my view. I leant over the balcony as far as I dared, but I couldn't see him. I could hear him, however."

"What could you hear?" questioned Racksole sharply.

"It sounded like a sawing noise," said Nella; "and it went on for quite a long time—nearly a quarter of an hour, I should think—a rasping sort of noise."

"Why on earth didn't you come and warn me or someone else in the hotel?" asked Racksole.

"Oh, I don't know, dad," she replied sweetly. "I had got interested in it, and I thought I would see it out myself. Well, as I was saying, Mr. Babylon," she continued, addressing her remarks now to Félix, with a dazzling smile, "that noise went on for quite a long time. At last it stopped, and the figure re-appeared from under the wall, crossed the yard, climbed up the opposite wall by some means or other, and so over the railings into Salisbury Lane. I felt rather relieved then, because I knew he hadn't actually broken into the hotel. He walked down Salisbury Lane very slowly. A policeman was just coming up. 'Good-night, officer,' I heard him say to the policeman, and he asked him for a match. The policeman supplied the match, and the other man lighted a cigarette, and proceeded further down the lane. By cricking your neck from my window, Mr. Babylon, you can get a glimpse of the Embankment and the river. I saw the man cross the Embankment, and lean over the river wall, where he seemed to be talking to someone. He then walked along the Embankment to Westminster, and that was the last I saw of him. I waited a minute or two for him to come back,

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but he didn't come back, and so I thought it was about time I began to make inquiries into the affair. I went downstairs instantly, and out of the hotel, through the quadrangle, into Salisbury Lane, and I looked over those railings. There was a ladder on the other side, by which it was perfectly easy—once you had got over the railings—to climb down into the yard. I was horribly afraid lest someone might walk up Salisbury Lane and catch me in the act of negotiating those railings, but no one did, and I surmounted them, with no worse damage than a torn skirt. I crossed the yard on tiptoe, and I found that, in the wall, close to the ground, and almost exactly under my window, there was an iron grating, about one foot by fourteen inches. I suspected, as there was no other ironwork near, that the mysterious visitor must have been sawing at this grating for private purposes of his own. I gave it a good shake, and I was not at all surprised that a good part of it came off in my hand, leaving just enough room for a person to creep through. I decided that I would creep through, and now wish I hadn't. I don't know, Mr. Babylon, whether you have ever tried to creep through a small hole with a skirt on. Have you?"

"I have not had that pleasure," said little Félix, bowing again, and absently taking up a bottle which lay to his hand.

"Well, you are fortunate," the imperturbable Nella resumed. "For quite three minutes I thought I should perish in that grating, dad, with my shoulder inside and the rest of me outside. However, at last, by the most amazing and agonising efforts, I pulled myself through, and fell into this extraordinary cellar more dead than alive. Then I wondered what I should do next. Should I wait for the mysterious visitor to return, and stab him with my pocket scissors if he tried to enter, or should I raise an alarm? First of all I replaced the broken grating, then I struck a match, and saw that I had got landed in a wilderness of bottles. The match went out, and I hadn't another one. So I sat down in the corner to think. I had just decided to wait and see if the visitor returned, when I heard footsteps, and then voices, and then you came in. I must say I was rather taken aback, especially as I recognised the voice of Mr. Babylon. You see, I didn't want to frighten you. If I had bobbed up from behind the bottles and said 'Booh!' you would have had a serious shock. I wanted to think of a way of breaking my presence gently to you. But you saved me the trouble, dad. Was I really breathing so loudly that you could hear me?"

The girl ended her strange recital, and there was a moment's silence in the cellar. Racksole merely nodded an affirmative to her concluding question.

"Well, Nell, my girl," said the millionaire at length, "we are much obliged for your gymnastic efforts—very much obliged. But now I think you had batter go off to bed. There is going to be some serious trouble here, I'll lay my last dollar on that!"

"But if there is to be a burglary I should so like to see it, dad," Nella pleaded. "I've never seen a burglar caught red-handed."

"This isn't a burglary, my dear. I calculate it's something far worse than a burglary."

"What?" she cried. "Murder? Arson? Dynamite plot? How perfectly splendid!"

"Mr. Babylon informs me that Jules is in London," said Racksole quietly.

"Jules!" she exclaimed under her breath, and her tone changed instantly to the utmost seriousness. "Switch off the light, quick!" Springing to the switch, she put the cellar in darkness.

"What's that for?" said her father.

"If he comes back he would see the light and be frightened away," said Nella. "That wouldn't do at all."

"It wouldn't, Miss Racksole," said Babylon, and there was in his voice a note of admiration for the girl's sagacity.

"Listen, Nella," said the latter, drawing his daughter to him in the profound gloom of the cellar. "We fancy that Jules may be trying to tamper with a certain bottle of wine—a bottle

(*Continued on page* 670.)

St. Paul's Dome Points the Way.

Some things in this world, even though the purpose in creating or constructing them may have been more or less selfish, appear to be ordained to do good in some way to the people at large. Thus, St. Paul's Cathedral was built simply as a place of worship, yet it is a sort of hub to the great wheel of London; a monument whereby to identify and locate the city. For many miles outside of London you can see the great dome of St. Paul's swelling up in the air; and you have only to say to the inquiring stranger who is seeking the centre of the largest city in the world, "You see the dome of the Cathedral? Yes. Well, make straight for it, and it will lead you into the heart of London."

Oblige me now by reading these sentences, taken from a letter written by Mrs. Mary Northey, of 20 Hull Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, on June 2nd, 1897, and the little talk that follows it, and you will understand the point of the chat about the dome of St. Paul's:—

"In September of 1896 my health began to fail me. I felt low, weak, and tired. My appetite was poor, and after eating I had a nagging pain at the chest through to my back. I had a doctor attending me and I saw two other doctors, and went to the Newcastle Infirmary, where they wanted to operate on me, but I refused to let them do it. Nothing gave me relief. One doctor said that my stomach was ulcerated, and gave me up, saying he could do no more for me. I had a nurse attending me, being very weak. I gave up hopes of getting better, when in November (1896) I *read in a book* of cases like mine that were cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a bottle of it, and after taking it I felt that it was doing me good. I persevered with it, and soon gained strength and gradually regained good health, all the pain leaving me."

Mrs. Northey now lives at 13 Hull Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and on February 15th, 1904, she signed another statement in which she says:—"Some six or seven years ago I had occasion to write to you of the wonderful cure effected in me by Mother Seigel's Syrup. Since then I have continued in excellent health, and am now as well and strong as a woman could wish to be. When I began taking Mother Seigel's Syrup I had almost given up hope of relief. I could eat no solid food, and I became so weak that I had to take to bed, and I had been there four months when I finally tried Mother Seigel's Syrup. Soon I was on the high road to health again, and I have never had a day's illness since. Mother Seigel's Syrup saved my life, and I shall always recommend it when I can."

The little book Mrs. Northey read in bed served, in her distress, the same purpose that St. Paul's dome does to the wayfarer seeking London—it "pointed the way," and by following its directions she regained health and strength and happiness rapidly, and at little or no expense. Take a leaf of wisdom from her book of experience; let her point the way for you.

A SPRING TONIC

Helps to purify the blood and cleanse the system; makes you strong and "fit" for the labours, and pleasures, of the coming summer. "I had a good appetite, and ate plenty of nourishing food; yet I grew thinner and weaker all the time," says Mrs. Martha Beverley, of 154, Abingdon Road, Middlesboro'. "I had pains in my stomach after eating; my nights were sleepless. Four years ago I was cured by using Mother Seigel's Syrup, in six months, after suffering for 20 years."

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which might possibly be drunk by Prince Eugen. Now, do you think that the man you saw might have been Jules?"

"I hadn't previously thought of him as being Jules, but immediately you mentioned the name I somehow knew that he was. Yes, I am sure it was Jules."

"Well, just hear what I have to say. There is no time to lose. If he is coming at all he will be here very soon—and you can help." Racksole explained what he thought Jules' tactics might be. He proposed that if the man returned he should not be interfered with, but merely watched from the other side of the glass door.

"You want, as it were, to catch Mr. Jules alive?" said Babylon, who seemed rather taken aback at this novel method of dealing with criminals. "Surely," he added, "it would be simpler and easier to inform the police of your suspicion, and to leave everything to them?"

"My dear fellow," said Racksole, "we have already gone much too far without the police to make it advisable for us to call them in at this somewhat advanced stage of the proceedings. Besides, if you must know it, I have a particular desire to capture the scoundrel myself. I will leave you and Nella here, since Nella insists on seeing everything, and I will arrange things so that once he has entered the cellar Jules will not get out of it again—at any rate through the grating. You had better place yourselves on the other side of the glass door, in the big cellar; you will be in a position to observe from there. I will skip off at once. All you have to do is to take note of what the fellow does. If he has any accomplices within the hotel we shall probably be able by that means to discover who the accomplice is."

Lighting a match and shading it with his hands, Racksole showed them both out of the little cellar. "Now, if you lock this glass door on the outside he can't escape this way; the panes of glass are too small and the woodwork too stout. So, if he comes into the trap, you two will have the pleasure of actually seeing him frantically writhe therein, without any personal danger; but perhaps you'd better not show yourselves."

In another moment Félix Babylon and Nella were left to themselves in the darkness of the cellar, listening to the receding footfalls of Theodore Racksole. But the sound of these footfalls had not died away before another sound greeted their ears—the grating of the small cellar was being removed.

"I hope your father will be in time," whispered Félix.

"Hush!" the girl warned him, and they stooped side by side in tense silence.

A man cautiously but very neatly wormed his body through the aperture of the grating. The watchers could only see his form indistinctly in the darkness. Then, being fairly within the cellar, he walked without the least hesitation to the electric switch and turned on the light. It was unmistakably Jules, and he knew the geography of the cellar very well. Babylon could with difficulty repress a start as he saw this bold and unscrupulous ex-waiter moving with such an air of assurance and determination about the precious cellar. Jules went directly to a small bin which was numbered 17, and took therefrom the topmost bottle.

"The Romanée-Conti—Prince Eugen's wine!" Babylon exclaimed under his breath.

Jules neatly and quickly removed the seal with an instrument which he had clearly brought for the purpose. He then took a little flat box from his pocket, which seemed to contain a sort of black salve. Rubbing his finger in this, he smeared the top of the neck of the bottle with it, just where the cork came against the glass. In another instant he had deftly replaced the seal and restored the bottle to its position. He then turned off the light, and made for the aperture. When he was half-way through Nella exclaimed, "He will escape after all. Dad has not had time—we must stop him."

But Babylon, that embodiment of caution, forcibly, but nevertheless politely, restrained this Yankee girl, whom he deemed so rash and imprudent, and before she could free herself the lithe form of Jules had disappeared.

As regards Theodore Racksole, who was to have caught his man from the outside of the cellar, he made his way as rapidly as possible from the wine-cellars up to the ground-floor, out of the hotel by the quadrangle, through the quadrangle, and out into the top of Salisbury Lane. Now, owing to the vastness of the structure of the Grand Babylon, the mere distance thus to be traversed amounted to a little short of a quarter of a mile, and, as it included a number of stairs, about two dozen turnings, and several passages which at that time of night were in darkness more or less complete, Racksole could not have been expected to accomplish the journey in less than five minutes. As everybody knows, there is a sharp, short bend in Salisbury Lane near the top. Racksole ran round this at good racing speed, but he was unfortunate enough to run straight up against a policeman.

"Hullo!" he said, his naturally suspicious nature being doubtless aroused by the spectacle of a bareheaded man in evening-dress running violently down the lane. "What's this? Where are you orf in such a hurry?" and he forcibly detained Theodore Racksole for a moment and scrutinised his face.

"Now, officer," said Racksole quietly, "none of your larks, if you please. I've no time to lose."

"Beg your pardon, sir," the policeman remarked, though hesitatingly and not quite with good temper, and Racksole was allowed to proceed on his way. The millionaire's scheme for trapping Jules was to get down into the little sunk yard by means of the ladder, and then to secrete himself behind some convenient abutment of brickwork until Mr. Tom Jackson should have got into the cellar. He therefore nimbly surmounted the railings—the railings of his own hotel—and was gingerly descending the ladder, when lo! a rough hand seized him by the coat-collar, and, with a ferocious jerk, urged him backwards. The fact was, Theodore Racksole had counted without the policeman. That guardian of the peace, mistrusting Racksole's manner, had quietly followed him down the lane. The sight of the millionaire climbing the railings had put him on his mettle, and the result was the ignominious capture of Racksole. In vain Theodore expostulated, explained, anathematised. Only one thing would satisfy the stolid policeman—namely, that Racksole should return with him to the hotel and there establish his identity. If Racksole then proved to be Racksole, owner of the Grand Babylon, well and good—the policeman promised to apologise. So Theodore had no alternative but to accept the suggestion. To prove his identity was, of course, the work of only a few minutes, after which Racksole, annoyed, but cool as ever, returned to his railings.

In the meantime, our friend Jules, sublimely unconscious of the altercation going on outside, and of the special risk which he ran, was, of course, actually in the cellar, which he had reached before Racksole got to the railings for the first time. It was, indeed, a happy chance for Jules that his exit from the cellar coincided with the period during which Racksole was absent from the railings. As Racksole came down the lane for the second time, he saw a figure walking about fifty yards in front of him towards the Embankment. Instantly he divined that it was Jules, and that the policeman had thrown him just too late. He ran, and Jules, hearing the noise of pursuit, ran also. The ex-waiter was fleet; he made direct for a certain spot in the Embankment wall, and, to the intense astonishment of Racksole, jumped clean over the wall, as it seemed, into the river. "Is he so desperate as to commit suicide?" Racksole exclaimed as he ran, but a second later the puff and snort of a steam launch told him that Jules was not quite driven to suicide. As the millionaire crossed the Embankment roadway he saw the funnel of the launch move out from under the river wall. It swerved into midstream and headed towards London Bridge. There was a silent mist over the river. Racksole was helpless.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

A Case for Waiting.

"ELDRED" is just beginning to keep company with a young lady. He feels he would like to ask her to become more to him than a friend, but he is only twenty-one, and though he is in a permanent situation, he is not yet making enough money to ask her to be his wife. Should he, in the circumstances, propose, or wait until he is better off?

* * * * *

As you have only just met the young lady, and do not seem to have got beyond the friendship stage, it would be unwise in any case to commit yourself to a proposal until you know each other better. It is all very well for a young man in such a position as yourself to become engaged to a girl, if he and she are really deeply in love, and determined to be faithful to each other, but it is not wise for a young couple to tie themselves to an engagement in the absence of any such constant devotion. Certainly wait a while, before you propose anything, in the meantime taking every opportunity to improve your intimacy with her.

Wedding Points.

"PATER." It is not compulsory for you to provide the carriages for all the guests at your daughter's wedding. You provide the bridal carriage, of course, and those for your own party. The friends and relations of the bridegroom generally provide their own, and the happy man himself rides in a vehicle hired for himself by the best man, with whom he travels to the church. As to the other point you mention, no doubt the bride herself knows all about it. However, it is usual for her to retain her bridal costume during the breakfast, and while the compliments are being passed. After that, she steals away, and changes her dress. It is very unusual for a girl to travel in her bridal costume, unless it is properly covered by a travelling cloak. Nowadays, people do not go in for advertising the fact that they are newly-married to all and sundry, but like to get rid of wedding clothes and attributes directly the ceremony is over.

An Introduction Problem.

"PHIL" is acquainted with a young lady, who lives in a different district. Recently, the lady came to stay in the same neighbourhood as "PHIL'S" home. "PHIL" naturally wanted to introduce her to his parents and family. Would it be etiquette for "PHIL" to ask her himself to call at the house, or how could the introduction have been arranged?

* * * * *

It would have been better if you had managed to meet the lady while walking in the street with your mother, or one of the family. You could then have introduced her, and your mother would have said: "We shall be very glad to see you if you can come to tea." That would save the awkwardness of your asking her yourself to make the call.

Be Perfectly Open.

"UNDECIDED" is a young lady who was engaged two years ago, but having broken it off, is now engaged to another young man. She wishes to know if she should tell her present *fiancé* of her former engagement. I should advise "Undecided" to do so, because if she does not he is almost sure to hear of it sooner or later from somebody else. To be perfectly open with those we love is the only way to insure a happy life with them.

Coolness.

I CANNOT offer you much advice, "N. B. H." You evidently failed to keep an appointment with the young man who had been so attentive to you, and he took offence because you gave no reason for failing him. Since this, he has been cool towards you, and has refused to give you an explanation. Well, that seems a very likely thing to happen. Young men, just beginning to be interested in a girl, are very sensitive to anything which resembles a slight, and their wounded feelings are difficult to heal. As, however, you say he is anxious to meet you again, though he refuses to give you an explanation of his coolness, you must decide for yourself whether or not your fondness for him is such as to warrant your forgiving his silence. Personally, I think it would be better for you to agree not to ask him to give a reason. It is never well for love to reopen old sores, after they have once healed.

When Not to Propose.

"M. E." If the young lady does not seem at all in love with you, it would not be very wise to propose marriage to her. However, a young man can declare his love for a girl, without committing himself to a proposal. I believe in declarations of love, as, though the girl may be cool, it turns her thoughts to the possibility of her getting to love the man, and when a girl's thoughts are once turned that way, a happy result may often be expected. So I advise you to declare your love, and abide by the result. Will "ANXIOUS" take this advice also in his own case, as he and "M. E." seem to be in exactly the same position.

Girl, Man, and a Cab.

"I TRAVELLED some distance in the train with a strange gentleman," writes "CISSIE," "whose looks rather suggested that he would like to know me. However, he did not speak to me. It was a very wet night, and on arriving at the station we were both going to, we found there was only one cab to be had, which both of us required. The young man came up and spoke to me. 'I hope,' he said, 'that you will take the cab. I will walk.' I accepted his kind offer. What I want to know is: Ought I to have asked him to share the cab? Secondly, do I know that young man if he should bow when next we meet?"

* * * * *

An awkward position, "CISSIE." Personally, I don't think there would have been much harm in your sharing the cab under the circumstances, if it was very wet, and the walk a long one. But though some young ladies might safely have done this in the case of certain young men, in other cases it would have been wrong. A girl well able to look after herself might agree to such a thing in the case of a man who had the appearance of respectability. You, however, took the more becoming course, though under some circumstances you might have acted differently. Of course, you don't know the young man when you next meet, and I don't suppose he would be so forward as to bow to you. But one has heard of romances beginning in the way you mention, and very pretty ones, too.

Cynthia

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